

**LETTERS OF  
A  
HEADMASTER SOLDIER  
HARRY SACKVILLE LAWSON**

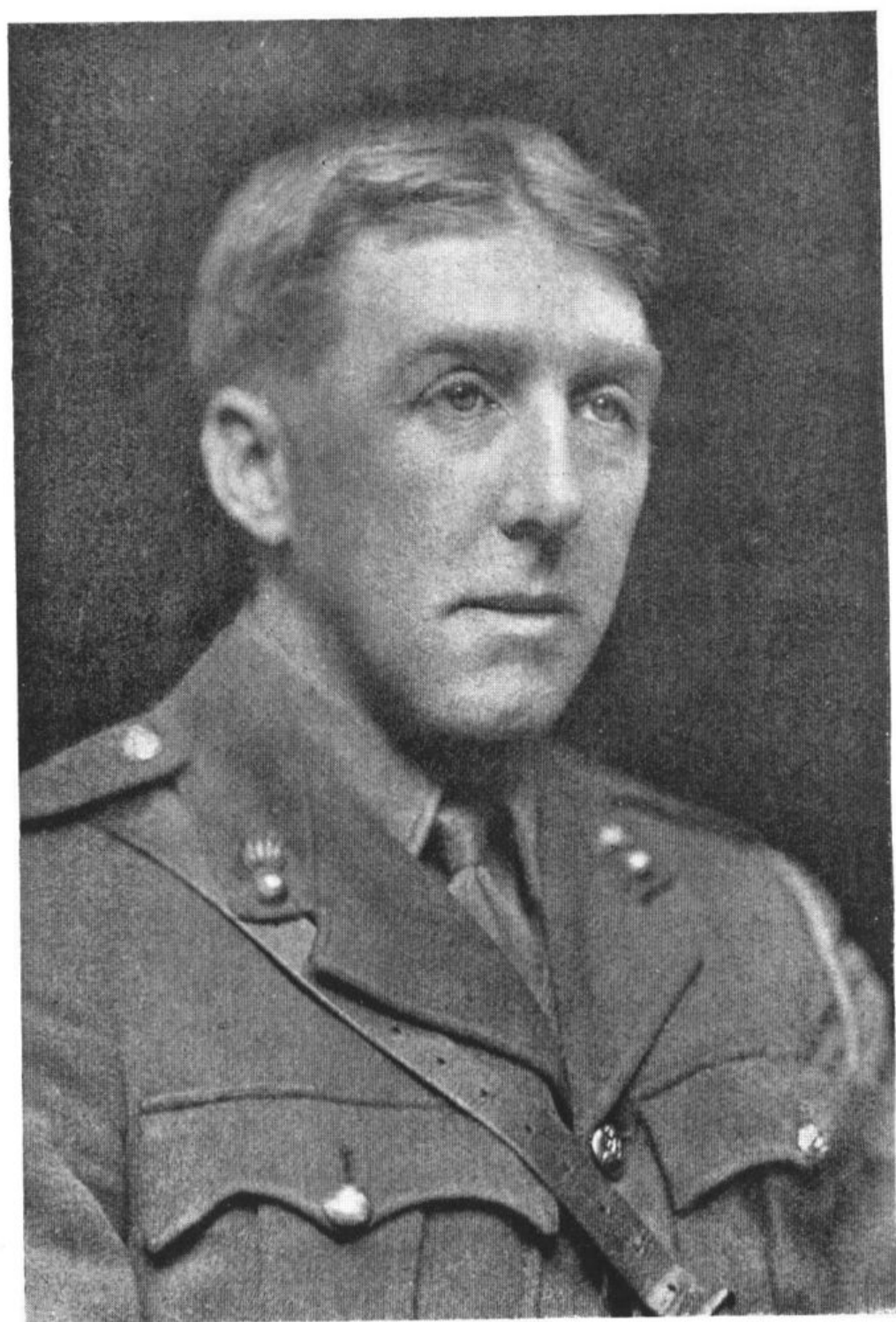
19642

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# LETTERS OF A HEADMASTER SOLDIER

SIC LUCEAT LUX VESTRA

LONDON: H. R. ALLENSON, LIMITED  
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1918

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LETTERS AND MEMOIR  
OF  
HARRY SACKVILLE LAWSON  
M.A.

HEADMASTER OF BUXTON COLLEGE  
1911-1917

LIEUTENANT R.F.A., ATTACHED R.G.A.  
1916-1918

DEDICATED TO  
HIS CHILDREN AND HIS OLD BOYS

SIC LUCEAT LUX VESTRA

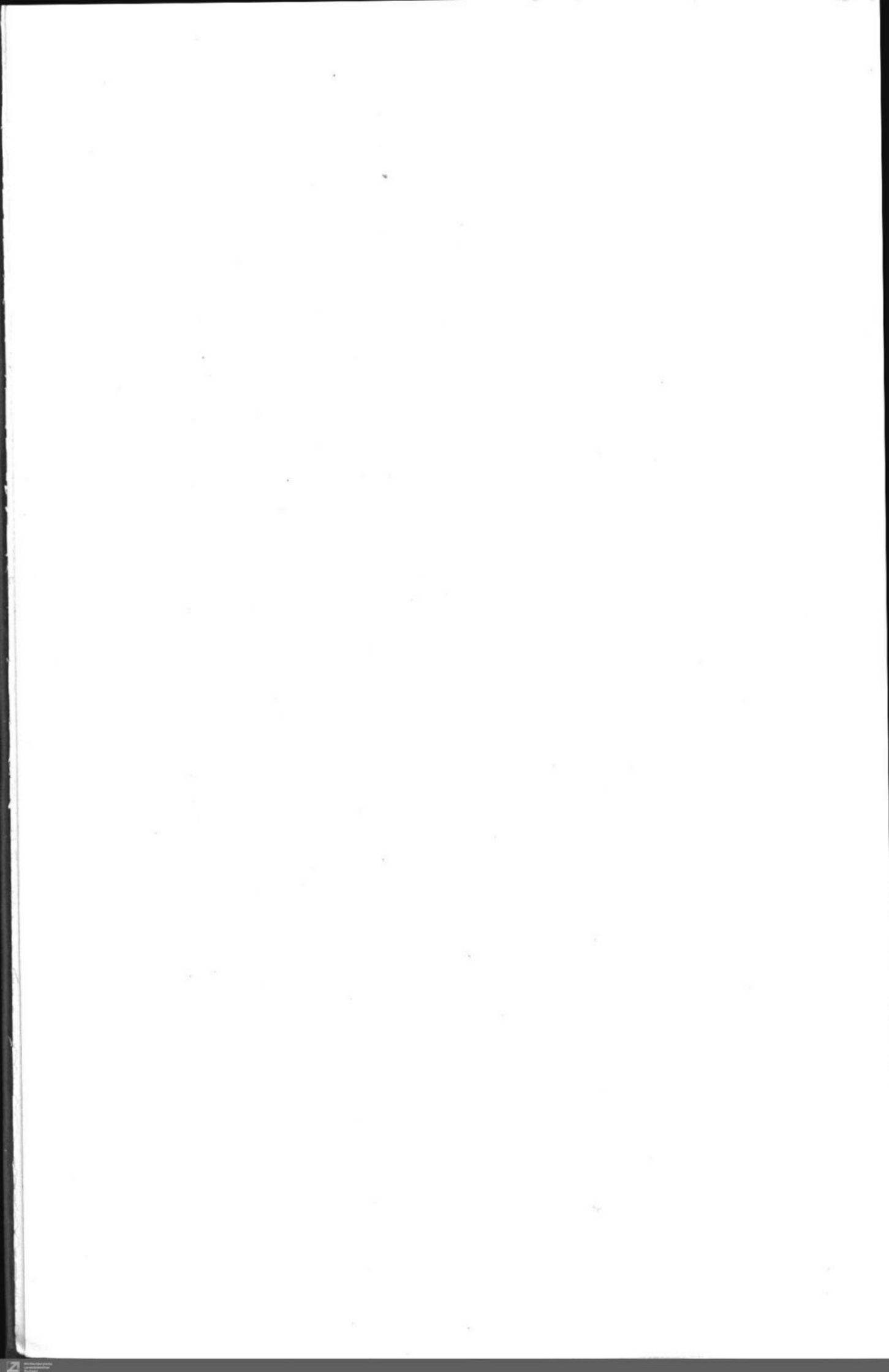
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## PREFACE

THIS little book of letters, written home by Harry Sackville Lawson, who was killed in action on the Western Front on February 5th, 1918, has been compiled chiefly in order that his old boys of Buxton College may share with his family some further knowledge of his life from the time he left the College for the Army. It is suggested that other readers, to whom the writer was not personally known, should read first his farewell letter to the boys, which will be found in its chronological place on page 42. The prayer on the last page was written by him for his boys, and used every evening at House Prayers.

M. S. LAWSON

J. K. LAWSON



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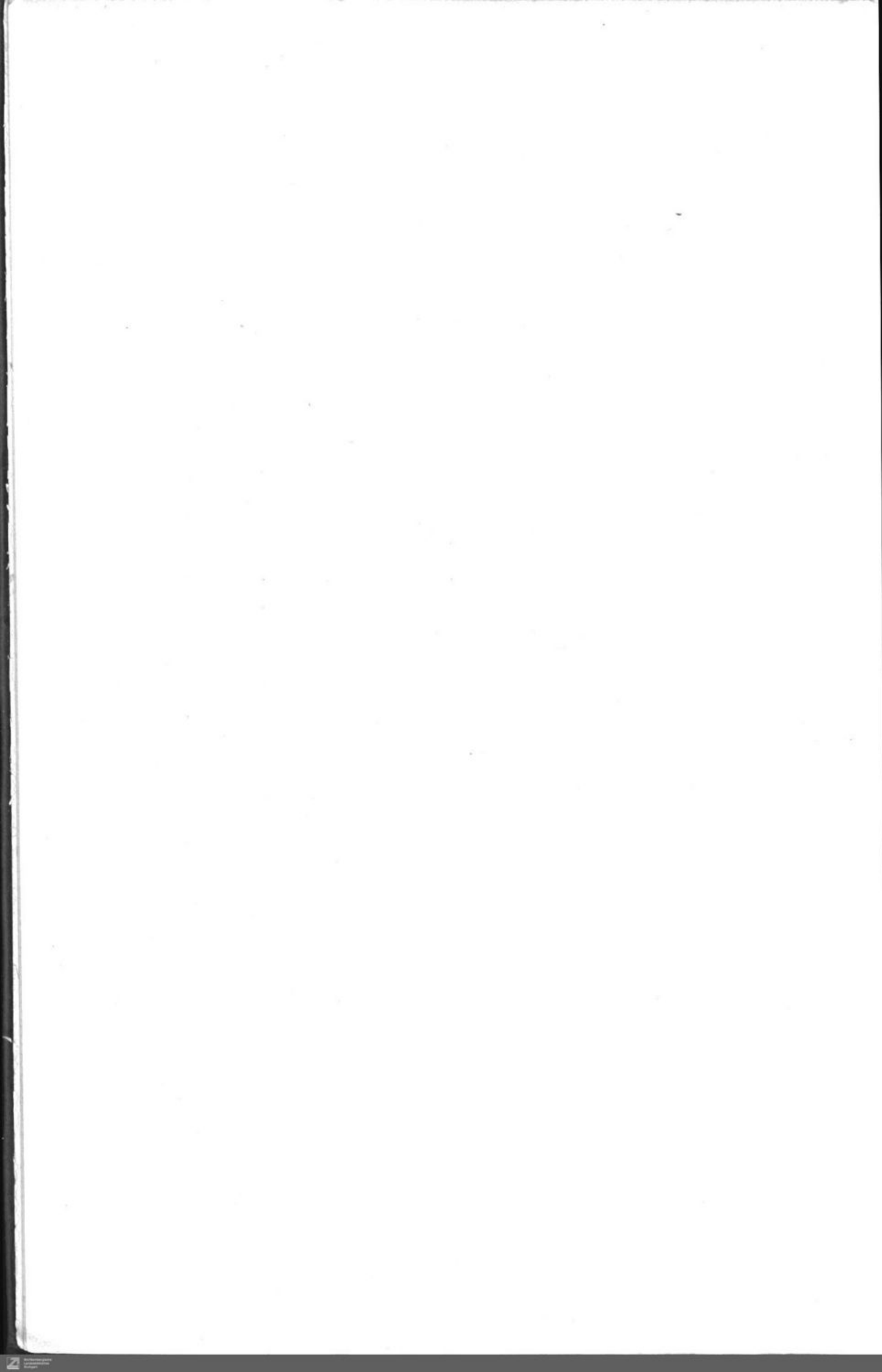
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## CHAPTER I

### THE HEADMASTER IN THE MAKING

HARRY SACKVILLE LAWSON was born on Sunday, October 29th, 1876, at Weston-in-Gordano, Somerset. His father was Robert Lawson, then Incumbent of Peasedown S. John, and his mother a daughter of John Mason Neale. The fourth child in a family of seven, with a sister and two brothers older and a sister and two brothers younger than himself, his personality was always outstanding as hero, leader in mischief, torment, delight and terror in nursery and schoolroom. His pranks and accidents, quaint sayings and lightning repartees, made his name a household word.

*Ex ore infantium perfecisti laudem.* Together with his irrepressible spirit of mischief there was a vivid realisation of the unseen often expressed quaintly enough in an apt quotation from Bible or hymn, or in repartee or argument. He urged that it was "very silly of Letty" (his little sister) "to mind when he roared in the dark, for if there were tigers under the bed, GOD could take care of her"; he justified his request to draw a picture of an angel travelling by train on the ground of "when I go by train an Angel goes with me"; he terrified his mother (who knew how entirely capable he was of making the experiment) by raising the end of a heavy

rocking-horse high above his head and announcing, "If I let this go, I shall never get up any more and then I shall go to God." He was very tender-hearted towards animals, and prayed for his cat after her death, because "she was so good she must be somewhere." His tearful and passionate defence of a cat which was being tormented by his schoolmates made them present him with a rattle for his "babyishness." Never did a mark of humiliation fail more completely in its object, for he came home flourishing the rattle in triumph.

His first school (as day boy) was Miss Willis' at Clevedon, his father being at this time Vicar of S. John's, Clevedon; from thence he went to Walton Lodge, under the Rev. Stephen Cornish. (Memory has a picture of him there on a windy Saturday afternoon, tousled head, and book in hand, economising his time whilst goal-keeping by learning "The Christian Year" for next day's repetition.) From Clevedon he went in succession to Haileybury; Technical College, Folkestone; and Peterhouse, Cambridge, where he took a Second-Class Honours in Natural Science. He rowed in his College boat and won his oar for four bumps in Lent 1896.

His first mastership was at Seafeld Park College, where he had complete charge of the Chemical Labs., and was Senior Housemaster. After two years there he was for a year tutor to Lord Morton's sons, and then, with a view to a Government Inspectorship, went for four months' training in teaching to Redcliffe, Bristol. From Bristol he went to Liverpool College for a year and a half. Then came two and a half years in Egypt at the

Tewfikieh Government School at Cairo. Here he soon got upon the best of terms with his Egyptian pupils, as is shown by many a strangely-worded epistle from them, some in Arabic, some in English. One of them writes: "Although your portrait is engraved in my heart and nothing can erase it, I am very sad as I am not going to hear your good advices and teaching again. If all teachers of physics are put in one pan of a balance and you are put in the other, I am sure they will be in proportion to you, in weight, what a mosquito is to an elephant. . . . I will ask GOD to let me see you again. . . ."

During his time in Egypt he generally lived outside Cairo, bicycling to and from his work every day. A friend and colleague writes: "His one idea seemed to be to enjoy the country in every way, to live outside the town where he could get to know the unadulterated native, where, above all, you can revel in Egyptian colour—the edge of the desert. . . . He would never spend the week-end anywhere but in the desert, riding or on foot, and I think that was how I first got really to know him. . . . Those certainly were happy times, and the best holidays I ever had in my life were our camel trips to the Fayum, and I shall always think of him with his shock of hair, and his blue eyes sparkling with the lust of murder of the elusive duck, or dreamily smiling as we sat over the toddy at the end of the day.

"I was always learning something more about him. . . . He would very seldom talk seriously about the native, but I soon found out that he was one

of the few men in our ministry who looked on his work from any other point of view than getting as many shekels as possible from the Egyptian Government, and he never quite said . . . but I think it was the feeling that he was not likely in the circumstances <sup>1</sup> to do anything with life there that he decided to go. Because he must have known that he would very soon have got a place in the Ministry and regular rise in grade, salary, and official respectability. I used at one time to have an idea that he was easy-going, and just chose to smile at things and people whatever was said and done. He was certainly one of the most even-tempered of men, but the few occasions on which I saw him angry made me realise that he wasn't really a bit easy-going. Why, he almost made his Bedouin servants honest, and he certainly imbued them with a tendency that way. I never discovered how he did it, but they quite lost their way of explaining things away when with him. . . . There was no other man in our department of whom they were so afraid and who got such good service out of them."

He left Egypt in 1908 and, after a temporary engagement to fill a gap at Wellington, went as Assistant Master to Wolverhampton. Here he had charge of the Chemistry throughout the school, but his teaching was not confined to his special subject. The study of pedagogy, more especially in relation to mental fatigue, and a paper he wrote on the subject, brought him to the notice of the British Association, who appointed him on a sub-committee to consider and report on Mental Fatigue.

<sup>1</sup> There had been a change of policy as to Education.



On August 4th, 1909, he married Janet, the second daughter of Mr Oliver J. Trinder of Caterham, Surrey. Their first home was at Wolverhampton, and there their first child was born, and in the autumn of 1910 Mr Lawson accepted the Headmastership of Buxton College.

His wide and varied experience of schools and teaching was no doubt an important factor in his career, so was also his love of reading; but behind all this was the fact that he was, so to speak, a "born schoolmaster." Not only had he a natural love of teaching, but he had never forgotten, as many do, what it was to be a boy himself, and he kept his boyish heart, his boyish originality and love of fun, all through his life, as witness his letters to his own children. It was this that made him an ideal schoolmaster, able to maintain good discipline with ease, and able to understand a boy's difficulties and temptations and give him just that strong uplifting sympathy which he needed.

For all this, and for his rare gifts of organisation and administration, he had scope in the working up of Buxton College, whose old Foundation with its beautiful motto was a great joy to him. He found the school at a low ebb and threw himself with all his heart into the work of building it up, of reviving its corporate life, and of inspiring his boys with those ideals of citizenship and public spirit which will ever be associated in their minds with the example of his own life and death.

Step by step the school rose, till in the summer of 1914 it became necessary to consider the question of taking another house.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SOLDIER IN THE MAKING

WAR was declared on August 4th, 1914. On the 7th Mr Lawson wrote from Bath to his wife as follows :—

. . . I'm awfully glad we are going into this thing so thoroughly. It seems to me there never has been a more righteous war waged. I got at Wyman's in London the White Paper in which is a detailed account of all the dispatches passing between London, Berlin, Vienna, St Petersburg and Belgrade. German iniquity is transcendently clear.

Concerning myself I feel that every bit of energy should be directed in some way or other against Germany. I feel also that I must get the College straight for next term before deciding anything definite about myself. I have written to the Staff to ask if they are volunteering their services, and telling them to send me a telegram to Buxton when anything is decided.

During the month all his staff joined the Forces. He himself took a preliminary course of training with the Manchester special constables and became O.C. of the College Cadet Corps. He was already on the Householders' Register, and was called up

in January in connection with this. After a busy fortnight spent in trying to find a successor, came a refusal from the authorities to accept him, owing to the importance of his work as Headmaster. This for a time closed the matter, but in the following autumn he offered himself again and was accepted. He was gazetted 2nd Lieutenant R.F.A. on December 19th, 1915, the last day of the Christmas term, and despite much responsible work and strong recommendations for promotion, 2nd Lieutenant he remained till at the end of the eighteen months he became necessarily full Lieutenant. His was one of those cases in which our national gift of "muddling through" was apparent rather for the "muddle" than for the "through." He used to blame what Ian Hay calls the "Practical Joke Department" and wonder at its resourcefulness. His letters show how keenly he, at the age of forty, felt this lack of scope, but his ready sense of humour and cheerful philosophy stood him in good stead.

An acting Headmaster was appointed to carry on his work at Buxton College, and at the request of the governors Mr Lawson retained the Headmastership. His wife remained there till he finally resigned in the summer of 1917. He was thus able to keep closely in touch with the school life, as is shown by the farewell letter to his boys written from the firing line on July 3rd.<sup>1</sup>

On December 30th he joined his brigade.

<sup>1</sup> See page 42.

*To his Wife.*

NEAR WINCHESTER,

*January 6th, 1916.*

Another subaltern arrived last night, so we are now five in the hut for sleeping, eating and dressing. In the early morning there is a complete jamb, as the five servants are in the hut cleaning up and furbishing in addition to ourselves washing and shaving and dressing. It's quite a piggery. But I've quite settled down and don't notice it in particular. As for reading and writing, there are few things more impossible, but I daresay I shall find a way of straightening out things later.

NEAR WINCHESTER,

*Jan. 28th, 1916.*

. . . I think the most difficult part of the work is the fact that generalisations are nothing and detail is everything. You are allowed to generalise a bit when you have seen eight or ten years' service in the Army, but not before. Also, of course, in my case there is the further handicap of my having given orders for the last five or six years and of not having received them. It's a case of adaptation. However, I've no doubt the instinct for rapid memorisation of detail will develop. It's been a very busy week and I've learnt a lot. I shall spend most of to-morrow at the "Black Swan," Winchester, and have a luxurious hot bath.

After a ten weeks' course he was appointed Assistant Gunnery Instructor. "It's just what I want,"

he wrote, "though I don't want it permanently. But there's nothing like teaching for getting one's knowledge of a subject thorough." He was soon I.C. Gunnery, and retained this post the greater part of the year, having control at one period of three hundred gunners.

The following letters were written at this time:—

*After the battle of Jutland. Sunday, July 9th, 1916.*

MOTHER MINE,—Yes, it's a very fine dispatch but it takes a lot of reading. I am holding it over for chart study on the first evening I'm not too sleepy. The "Chester" is well to the fore. I'm so glad Beatty put in Bob's report on Gunner Cornwell. . . .

I was asking the Colonel last night about the other artillery training schools. . . . It appears that ours is quite the largest and is likely to become still larger. We are supposed to be getting shortly three hundred Australian gunners per month in addition to our normal establishment. This will mean more housing accommodation and more guns. Next spring, if the war lasts as long as that, we ought to have an enormous artillery superiority over the Germans. . . . It's very pleasing to see the co-ordination scheme of the Allies unfolding itself. They are a great people, the French. The more one sees and hears of ourselves the more amazing it is that they've borne our cranks and foibles with equanimity.

*August 21st.*

An Australian General was down here to-day inspecting. He stayed with us half an hour watch-



ing battery gun drill, and thanked me for all we were doing for the Australians. Very gracious from a General. They generally strafe freely on trivial points of small importance. . . .

BORDEN,  
Nov. 10th, 1916.

*To his Wife.*

The more I reflect the more I feel my job is not here. The organisation is sound, and the scheme will run. The other officers with me are all capable and good instructors. Ten years ago I shouldn't have hesitated as to what to do for more than twenty-four hours, but you and the children make the problem a stiff one. However, I am quite clear in my mind now as to what is right.

At this time there was a call for volunteers for Siege Artillery, which he welcomed as his opportunity. He was appointed to a new battery which he formed and of which he became second in command. "Well," he writes, "I am mighty glad to leave this place on personal grounds, and I'm still more glad to have the opportunity of dealing a more direct blow at the Huns than merely training gunners."

It was not till this battery was nearly fully trained that he was able to get his own Siege course. Time was pressing, and he obtained permission to take it in two weeks instead of the customary five. This feat he accomplished with great success.

BUXTON, *March 5th.*

MOTHER MINE,—I am at home till Thursday next on embarkation leave unless the unexpected happens and I get posted to the command of a battery in the meanwhile. We mobilise at Codford and shall be there probably about a fortnight.

The fortnight's training at Lydd was very strenuous, all the more so in my particular case as there was the Horsham recommendation hanging over me. Major S., the Chief Instructor in Gunnery at Horsham, had reported to the W.O. "he might be fit to command and train a battery now." When I got to Lydd I saw the Staff Captain, who told me that he had received a telephone message about me from the W.O. and that they didn't much like rapid promotion from Subaltern to Battery Commander, so that's how things stood at Lydd, and that is how things stand at the present time.

He did not go overseas at this time, but was posted to a Battery Commander's "Course" at Lydd.

NEW OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE CLUB,  
*To his Wife.* *April 1st, 1917.*

Here I am on forty-eight hours' leave waiting for orders to come through. Lydd has not recommended me for the command of a battery. They were all quite pleasant about it, and the decision did not rest upon what I did do, or did not do, so much as upon the fact (1) that Officers should not be recommended without previous experience in France for command of a battery, (2) that I am a Subaltern! . . .

OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE CLUB,

*To his Mother.**April 3rd.*

. . . The upshot of the whole matter is, I fancy, a change in policy. It stands to reason that if Battery Commanders with overseas experience are available, it is not wise to risk giving commands to inexperienced officers. . . . On the personal side it's been very unpleasant. I have been hailed everywhere—Lydd and elsewhere—as a budding Battery Commander. I find myself after three weeks of this glory well situated for a junior post in some new battery I've never seen before.

But you know these things don't upset me very long. I could see humour in the situation by Sunday morning.

*To his Wife.**April 3rd.*

Nothing from Lydd in this morning yet. . . . I will let you have a wire when I know my destination. Don't worry about me, Love. I am very tough and have got a sense of humour. Also don't forget that my favourite hymn is, "GOD moves in a mysterious way."

HILSEA, PORTSMOUTH,

*May 10th, 1917.*

MOTHER MINE,—Just a line before I go overseas. Our advance party left yesterday, our guns and stores leave Portsmouth to-morrow, and the personnel depart on Saturday morning.

Janet and the children will probably go to East

Grinstead on Saturday and proceed to Buxton on Monday. We have heard of a house at E.G., or rather  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from E.G., which seems as if it might suit. . . .

I hope you will join Janet and make your permanent abode with her and the children, trekking from and returning thereto. I shall think of you as of Elisha, whose calls were many and various, but who returned continually to the crib prepared for him.

I am writing to David of Rugby to ask him to act as adviser in school problems which will crop up later on. I have not got Rugby in mind in particular for Robin, but merely Dr David, who is an honest man and whose judgment of boys and schools is very sound. The merit of a school depends very largely upon its Headmaster and its house masters. It would be David's job to advise on these matters when the time came.

Main problems in connection with Buxton College are more or less settled. One great blessing with regard to the future is that there are no money troubles. It has made things much easier all along. Also the experience which Janet has had the last year and a half will be helpful in all sorts of ways in the future. This is a year which has its anxieties other than war, but I feel sure that the general effect will be comforting rather than harmful. When there is need for the calm philosophic spirit ways and means are found to attain it. You mustn't think that I am viewing myself as a casualty. I'm not. I'm following the finger of the good GOD along the path towards the Great Adventure,

and there is no use in disguising from one's self the fact that the path is strewn with casualties. And apart from home ties I'm very glad to be getting the opportunity of a direct blow at the enemy and of severing my connection with all the home crowd wastrels of camp life.

I am taking out a modest little library with me—a few volumes of the Temple Bible in India paper—the Introduction—S. John's Works—Job and Ecclesiastes—and also Marcus Aurelius Antoninus. I don't imagine there will be much time for reading. It depends altogether upon what part of the Front we find ourselves. . . .

I'll drop you a line as soon as I can from the other side. I expect when — S.B. gets to work on the Boche the end of the war will soon be in sight !

Much love from us all.—Ever your loving son,

HARRY.



## CHAPTER III

### LETTERS FROM FRANCE

MAY TO SEPTEMBER 1917

*To his Wife.*

*May 14th.*

Here we are in a so-called rest camp. The accommodation for officers is pretty good except that tent floor boards feel very hard the first night. The men are accommodated twelve to a hut and are not allowed to leave the camp. It's a wretched life for them, particularly as there is nothing doing. However, we shall shortly get orders to move elsewhere. . . . Marcus Aurelius is very scornful of people who pine for lone mountains and islands with a view to avoiding their fellowmen. He says it should be quite sufficient for a man to withdraw into himself. But then he commanded armies and no doubt had a tent to himself and messed in icy isolation whenever the spirit moved him. If he had been a subaltern in the British Army he might have viewed things differently. I wandered into the town yesterday afternoon to get an impression of war conditions in France. I didn't see any sign of a scarcity of food. Tables were littered with bread, just as in the old days, and potatoes were being freely eaten. I got quite a good dinner for three francs. The cafés were doing a roaring trade,

and the eating-shops were plentifully stocked. . . .  
I am very fit and have lost all my lumbago. Even  
a hard tent floor was powerless to conjure it up.

FRANCE,  
May 14th.

MOTHER MINE,—Comfortable passage across.

Here we are in a rest camp and shall shortly be  
proceeding elsewhere. Very fit and well. Thank  
you so much for telegram from yourself and Letty.  
It reached me at Portsmouth just before I left the  
Hotel.

Psalm 121 is a great favourite. Also it was a  
chosen portion of the Bible in the old days when we  
learnt a bit of "summat" in the week for the  
Sunday following. I expect Father joined you in  
sending the message ["we wish you Good Luck in  
the Name of the Lord"].

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE,  
*To his Wife.* Saturday, May 19th, 1917.

I have had a most peaceful two days touring  
leisurely through the country in a comfortable  
motor car astern or ahead of a convoy of lorries.  
We have done a steady 9 miles per hour and have  
therefore had ample opportunity of examining the  
country critically. This part of France is certainly  
not hard hit by the war. One passes mile after  
mile of beautifully cultivated land—rich, trim, and  
almost meticulously neat. Certainly the labour  
available for the land is sufficient. They are using

their prisoners of war more than we are, but at the same time I can scarcely believe that P.Gs. (prisonniers de guerre) have done the bulk of the cultivation. The whole thing is so lush and fragrant that it would make your mouth water perennially if you were a cow. If we haven't enough corn this winter France ought to be able to keep us going. The bulk of the P.Gs. I have passed are decent-looking chaps. They appear to be very well fed and to work with willingness.

We bivouacked for lunch to-day in the middle of a great forest where nine roads meet. Such a peaceful spot. Not a sound anywhere except for singing birds. It was a sort of Shakespearian wood where elves would abound and where romance might be found in any and all of the nine clearings in the forest. Some of them lead to war, others backwards to peace. I have felt very remote from war the last forty-eight hours. We have been moving leisurely through a land of plenty, rich in all the necessities of life and still more rich potentially. It should be a bumper harvest. There are no tiresome restrictions. Bread is abundant and cheap, patisseries produce an abundant variety of confectionaries—cafés and estaminets are always open—beer and cider are still *compris* at all the restaurants, and cigarettes have a sur-tax only of ten centimes per half franc packet. It's Old England who is being hit—but hard hit mainly, I fancy, through bad administration and lack of foresight. Most of our troubles are due to that national characteristic which one might term "carrying on." Such a process lands one inevitably in improvisation.

Hence our recruiting troubles—our Irish question—our food problems and our industrial unrest. Here the clouds drop fatness because GOD helps those who help themselves, and those who do not put off to the morrow problems which confront the day. I salute *avec beaucoup d'empressement* a people who, after three years' uphill fight with the enemy in their midst, give the casual and leisurely traveller such a wealth of impressions of peace and prosperity.

To-morrow's journey will bring me to the battery and I shall have a different tale to tell.

I have not had a letter from you yet. Probably I shall not get any until we are settled down in our position on the line.

May 28th.

I hope with luck to snatch an hour for a letter. I'm going back to ——— this afternoon. Since I popped over to the other battery on a three days' liaison—nature of liaison not stated and still unexplained—I have made several steps in the direction of becoming primitive man. I am beginning to see no distinction between day and night, and I should soon forget that there was such a thing as a calendar were it not that I like to keep Sunday in my thoughts. Such was yesterday when the heathen furiously raged together. The Boche shelled us pretty heavily all the evening and most of the night, and also made two attacks with lachrimatory shell. He gave us shrapnel and time H.E. in addition, so there was a variety of

noise, from the dull roar of a distant heavy shell to the ear-splitting crack of shrapnel bursting overhead. The gas shells are quiet. You hear them hissing through the air, and plunging their noses into the ground. The burst is a kind of ooze. Had you with your mind's eye gazed across to these fields you would have seen a weird crowd of people with box respirators on, wandering about and awaiting the time when the air would be breathable once again. I got to bed about 6 a.m. this morning. This afternoon we are putting over some heavy stuff into the Boche lines. It is whistling overhead as I write.

Fortunately the weather is gorgeous. With rain here the conditions would become appalling. We are rather better situated in the place where my own battery is. I shall be glad to get back there to-night. . . . I was up at the back of our trenches yesterday assisting an officer in my liaison battery to register the line of fire. It's a wicked and dreary waste—ground ploughed up by shell fire—and brown, destitute farms and houses, stunted trees, and great billows of dust and smoke from exploding shells and trench mortars. We registered on a place called Somebody's Farm. There was one large stone visible—nothing else, and in all the wide sweep of country, visible through my glasses, I could see nothing whatever bearing material architectural shape.

We walked about a mile to get to this trench through quite pretty country. Several lilac trees in the woods were in full bloom and quite a number of wild flowers were growing on the graves of an



heroic regiment which faced appalling odds gloriously in the earlier stages of the war.

The afternoon is flying. Three whistles have just sounded which mean that German aeroplanes are overhead and everybody must lie doggo.

I got my first experience of what things are like last night. Tell Robin that I think my Guardian Angel was looking after me last night between six and eight o'clock when I was asleep. When my servant woke me in the morning he showed me a piece of shrapnel which was lying on the blanket. Tell him also that Guardian Angels make people sleep all right in the din of shell fire.

*June 2nd, 1917.*

MOTHER MINE,—Your letter of May 27 from Eastville has just reached me. It brings into these very drab and unromantic conditions and circumstances the fragrant beauty of azaleas, rhododendrons, and Spring. I'm so glad you had such a peaceful and sunny visit to Clevedon Court.

Many thanks for the little Psalter. There is no book so expressive as this of daily happenings out here. David chased by his enemies from one retreat to another resembles most of us out here in our daily peregrinations to avoid the line of fire of Boche shells. The difficulty at first is to detect what is the line of fire—whether the shell is coming straight for you or whether it is left or right. Upon a right judgment your movements depend.

There's an extraordinary contrast between our lines and the German lines. On our side an abund-

ance of shell craters it is true ; but there is green grass and woods and flowers. On the other side the whole country looks parched and withered. Trees are mangled and stunted and the whole appearance is desert. " The desert from the sown " is scarcely more apparent in the valley of the Nile. Again there is a mighty contrast in habitations. I looked at a big expanse of their lines through my field glasses from one of our trenches, and the whole panorama did not disclose a single habitable house or farm. All is rubble and desolation. Farther back of course our guns will not have fully reached, but the damage will have been heavy. The guns are never still. Sometimes you would describe it by the word din—at other times you can imagine such a thing as a countryside where explosive noises don't exist. I am writing in a splinter-proof hut with our own battery guns just below me. Every five minutes or so the candle goes out from the sudden vibration. I'm on night duty for three nights and am responsible for such night firing as there may be. Well, well—it's a blessing to feel that the next generation will not find themselves called upon to tackle a European War.

It's appallingly difficult to write letters. There's no time that one can call one's own apart from the fact that the continual bang, bang of heavy guns is disconcerting to quiet meditation. I shall soon get used to it and shall no doubt feel that commas and semicolons are not necessary every time the air vibrates heavily in my immediate neighbourhood.

Things seem to be going quite well at Buxton, and Janet is well on with preliminary proceedings.



She has not yet fixed on a house at East Grinstead. Now that I've got such a handy psalter I can punctuate my letters with a text from a psalm for the day.

This is the third morning, after a night sitting, so I'll select the last verse of Ps. 16.

. . . . .

Am immensely fit and have voracious appetite. If you can hear of a good and simple shock-absorber for the ear I should be glad to have one. It needs to be small and handy. I expect they are made.

*To his Wife.*

*Sunday, June 3rd, 1917.*

When you were snoozing last night about 2 to 5 a.m. I was engaged in firing salvos at the Boche. The intensity of firing from here is pretty prodigious at times, and one can't help feeling a bit sorry for the German soldier. Unfortunately the misery and wretchedness of life in the trenches over there does not touch the guilty ones, they are safe in the protection of deep dug-outs far back. Don't expect to hear much from me for the next week or ten days. It's quite possible that the posting of letters—together apart from the writing of them—will be difficult.

I'm very fit and manage to do quite well on a modicum of sleep. That is the one advantage in these stunts of middle age, I fancy. Youth requires more.

The men are sticking things very well, which is a good omen for the immediate future, which will test fairly severely their staying power. . . .

*June 6th, 1917.*

MY SWEET OLD FLICKERMAROOPIECE,—The lovely parcel which you, and Mummie, and Robin and Michael sent off has just arrived. I shall be able to have a nice large piece of "bedtime" chockie.

I am sitting in a rest camp which is about a mile away from our guns. We are in a wood overlooking a little village with a Church placed nicely in the middle of it. About half the battery will be here every night and go back to the guns in the morning. The guns fire day and night—not all day and night but for good long spells. Each of the shells we send over to the Germans as a present from the battery, weighs as much as you and Robin and Michael put together. They burst with a loud bang and make holes in the trenches nearly as big as the nursery.

Sometimes we have an aeroplane up in the sky to tell us whether we put our shells in the right places, and sometimes we go up to a place called O. Pip, on a little mountain, and watch the shells burst.

Yesterday on my way up I got bracketed, as it is called, by two German shells. One pitched 150 yards in front of me and the other 40 yards behind me. The one behind covered me with dust, but a Guardian Angel was near me, I think, and made the broken pieces of the shell fly off on either side. When I got up to the O. Pip (Observation Post) the whole of the German lines looked on fire. Shells were bursting everywhere, and

columns of yellow and black and white smoke hid everything behind. Soon we shall advance and take the country from the Germans. It is a very ugly country—yellow and dry and dusty and covered with craters—barbed wire and mangled houses. So much for the war. . . .

*To his Wife.*

*June 7th.*

I don't know what they will call this battle, but whether it's the third battle of Ypres, or the battle for the Messines Ridge, we've achieved our objective handsomely and at light cost from all accounts.

The show started at 3.10 a.m. this morning with the blowing up of two gigantic mines. That was the signal for a terrific artillery barrage, under cover of which the infantry went over. The whole scheme seems to have worked admirably. There was no countermanding of orders or panicky *arrière pensée*, the programme being carried out in entirety and according to plan. That seems to be the general impression, and it is certainly the truth with regard to this sector. The actual results achieved you will hear before we do. The lines to G.H.Q. will be so blocked with official messages that matters of no military importance will not be sent through.

About 9 a.m. this morning we got some indication that things were going well. In the first place the field artillery went forward to advanced positions. That was a cheering sign. Secondly, the kite balloons began to advance. About noon they hovered over our position instead of being consider-

ably in the rear. Thirdly, we knew by the switch orders we received that the advance was steady and progressive. Our guns have been nosing right all day, with the consequence that they all face askew to the platforms we built for them. We've done some heavy firing, and are still at it (twelve midnight). We shall stop firing for a few hours at 4.30 a.m. this morning. Between 3.10 a.m. on the morning of the 7th and 6 p.m. the evening of the same day we had put 30 tons of metal in the form of shells into the Boche lines.

As far as hostile shelling is concerned it has been an extraordinarily quiet day. Not a shell has fallen in our position, but I suppose we shall get counter-attacks to-morrow and the next day. If we have taken the whole of Messines Ridge, as I believe we have, important results should follow. In the first place, there is, I believe, no good defensive position between the Messines Ridge and the sea. Zeebrugge and Ostend might be possibilities of the near future as well as a descent on Lille and the other industrial towns.

It's peculiar how apposite to the events of the day are the first few verses of Psalm 35, the first of the psalms for the seventh day of the month. I read it last night. "Let a sudden destruction come upon him unawares," says the Psalmist. Well—the mines were colossal, the whole ground shook just as in an earthquake.

The preparation of them had taken months of skilled tunnelling work.

It's quite peaceful here to-night. I am sitting in the B.C. post in charge of affairs till 2.30 a.m.,

when B. takes my place and I go to roost. Hardly a gun is firing at the present minute.

We are not likely to stay in this position much longer. We shall probably get moving orders tomorrow to a position which will be a regular wilderness compared with this. I think we have struck the Boche a dangerous blow. It will be interesting to see the official report and to hear what the world thinks of it.

*Sunday, June 10th.*

I have been over the battle-field this morning ostensibly on reconnaissance work. We want to find a good O.P. on the top of the ridge. I was very keen to see at close quarters what a thorough artillery preparation is like. Hitherto I had only seen the German lines from a distance through field glasses. The state of the ground is indescribable. . . .

I got out of my clothes into pyjamas last night for the first time for three days and had a gorgeous sleep outside the B.C. post . . . on a bed which the R.F.A. had left behind when they advanced on the heels of the retreating Boche. The back of our position is becoming a kind of circus. Kite balloons amble about seeking rest for the soles of their feet—drawn along by a bevy of R.F.C. people. Hundreds of horses are in wagon lines by the side of the stream and are having a truly succulent time. Staff Officers come popping along at times seeking a place with adequate comforts. . . .

I fixed up Church parade this morning, a voluntary one for the half-battery not on duty with the guns :



thirty-nine out of forty-eight went over—quite a good muster. I couldn't go myself as I had the reconnaissance job on.

I am greatly impressed with the Staff organisation of the artillery work out here. It's wonderfully efficient. Until to-day I had not had an opportunity of judging the effect of our fire on the ground. It was colossal.

A FARM HOUSE IN FRANCE,  
*June 13th, 1917.*

MOTHER MINE,—We left our battery position in the firing line last Monday night and moved to a very peaceful spot some 20 miles away. It's a sleepy, indolent spot, almost out of hearing of gunfire.

Janet will have told you that I was in the Messines Ridge show. We moved straight up to our position on leaving the coast town and have been there until last Monday. I went over the battle-ground on Sunday on a tour of reconnaissance for our Observation Post. At that time we had not had orders to move; the state of the German defence system was something appalling. There was no such thing as a trench anywhere. The whole place was pitted with craters and strewn with wreckage and debris. All the wire had been cut; there was nothing left that could hinder an infantry advance. It's appalling to think what the German troops had been made to suffer during the bombardment. In addition every avenue of supply was shelled. *Our principal target was a sunken road which was*

enfiladed from our position. Our casualties were extraordinarily light. It was an artillery battle mainly, and the preparation work had been very thorough.

We are likely to move elsewhere shortly for another push. Meanwhile we are very lucky to have been given a few days in this quiet, peaceful countryside. . . .

We had an impromptu concert last night in the field at the back of the farm. There was no instrumental music, but trench light beer and a plenty of cigarettes provided excellent accompaniment for the songs. I sang "Peep Show," omitting the High Church Ritualist verse. I felt a little doubtful as to Daniel, but decided to let him take the field. Several French families from neighbouring farms joined the battery and seemed to enjoy themselves hugely. Mademoiselle of the farm said to me this morning, "When will you sing 'Peep Show' again?" Said I, "But you didn't understand it." "Oh yes," said she, "I understood it." She speaks English pretty well. Billetting has taken place here ever since the beginning of the war, so the inhabitants have by this time a pretty fair knowledge of the ways of the British. I wish I could see any signs of a move in Russia. If they could launch an offensive there this year the end of the struggle might be in sight. I fancy the German lines in the East are very thinly held. I was glad to see in the *Times* that Brusiloff had been appointed C.-in-C. It was he who conducted the big Russian offensive this time last year. . . .

There are mighty few chaplains about here. I've



only seen one since I've been in the line and he was attached to some divisional artillery away on our left. However, we're a sort of "Where the bee sucks there suck I" battery. We go to the push areas as reinforcing artillery, and we shall be on the move again shortly.

A PEACEFUL OLD FARM HOUSE,  
SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE,  
*June 13th, 1917.*

MY DEAR OLD MAN,—I am writing my birthday letter in a snug French Farm House. Pink Piggies are running about the Courtyard, and a fat old horse, with a sleek glossy neck, is looking over a gate, asking for somebody to give him a nice morsel to eat. He is not as pretty as Cleesy! Oh no! but he is quite as greedy!

Mummie will have told you all about the Big Battle we have fought for the Messines Ridge. It is a place of great strategic importance. This means that when we are on the top of it we can see all that the Germans are doing and can shell them. They can't see us because we are hidden by the Ridge. It is like being on the top of Solomon's mountain, and looking down on the valley beneath. You can see everything that is going on. . . . One of the craters we made in the German lines is big enough to hold, cover up, and conceal the whole of the College. A great big tunnel had been made underground by people called Sappers. It was fired by electricity. The ground shook like an earthquake. . . .

There is a nice text about Angels in the Psalm for to-day. Ask Mummie to show you Psalm 68, verse 17.

*To his Wife.*

*Sunday, June 17th, 1917.*

We move off to-morrow at 5 a.m., so there may be a break in my letters for a day or two. Have had quite a Sundayish Sunday, the first since I have been in France. I went to the eight o'clock service this morning in the school-room in the village near here, and fixed up a parade for the C. of E. men at 10 a.m. Quite a good muster. Good hymns, but a poor sermon.

I wrote to Rosem'ry this morning for her birthday and sent a couple of handkerchiefs, one for her and one for Robin. The twenty-franc note, which ought to have arrived, will be an extra birthday present for each, of their own selection.

The house at Tunbridge Wells sounds quite ideal. . . . I expect you will make an early journey down there and snap it up.

Mother sent me a four-leaved shamrock she had found—such a pretty specimen, and lines to accompany it on its journeys.

“There's one for Faith, and one for Hope,  
And one for Love, you know,  
And God made another one all for Luck  
In the place where the shamrocks grow.”

Well—it's going to be a mighty strenuous time with no rest camps for many a long day. Probably things will not be very strenuous for the next week,

but after a short time I have hopes that the Boche will see what the British Empire is made of. . . .

I am glad that you rubbed into Robin the principle of playing fair in all the little things of life. It's the lesson of the straight bat—the application of which to everyday life, or rather the holding fast to that application which distinguishes the Englishman from the Hun. The Hun is a dirty fighter, that's the first and the last word out here ; and a dirty fighter is an abomination unto the Lord. Robin's repartee about his brain deciding issues was very good. But what said his conscience ?

*June 25th.*

MOTHER MINE,—We are now settled down in our new battery position in very charming country. Things are pretty quiet on our side, but we shall shortly be putting the Boche in his right place. He has been top dog here for some time, whereas he ought to be a mere menial under iron control, a hewer of wood and drawer of water for the congregation until such time as he sees the error of his ways and understands the meaning of the word Gentleman.

We have got an excellent O.P. on a neighbouring hill, from which can be got an excellent view of the Boche territory. It all looks very smiling and happy at present. We man the O.P. for twelve hours at a stretch. One's turn comes about twice a week. . . .

R. writes very glowing accounts of Q. Co-education School. I have heard often enough of Q. but don't know it personally, I fancy the

whole thing depends on the personal element at the head of affairs. I've not been much impressed with such Co-ed. schools as I have seen, but they have been hampered one and all by interfering governing bodies. I shall be interested to hear how Q. pans out.

My love to Aunt Ermy, please tell her how much we appreciate the Psalms out here. It's an Old Testament atmosphere altogether, except at such times as the guns are silent and the countryside is at peace. Somehow, too, our method of war bears extraordinary resemblance in many respects to that of the Psalmist. There's no truck with the ungodly, no fraternisation with the enemy. And one feels very glad that the war is passing more and more into the hands of the Anglo-Saxon crowd. . . .<sup>1</sup> I heard a good preacher in that Church just off Trafalgar Square, when I was last in London. He had seen a good deal of service in the field and was at one time Chaplain to the Guards. He emphasised strongly—pleading for the union of Christendom—that *the* guiding principle in the R.C. Domain was *obedience*, in the Greek or Russian *love*, and in the English Church *duty*. Well, in a job like this, duty, it seems to me, is going to carry you further than anything else. Also it offers more scope for individual enterprise, since the interpretation of duty is subjective. One doesn't do such and such a thing because one has taken an oath of loyalty to the Crown, but simply because it seems the right game to play in the special circumstances prevailing. As a matter of fact I have taken no

<sup>1</sup> Deletion by Censor.

oath of loyalty, the stunt was never mentioned. About two months ago I believe Janet received a document from the Lord High Chamberlain or Executioner (I forget which) stating that I was a dearly beloved Officer and had certain duties to perform. But of all this I was kept in ignorance for fifteen months, and at the time of taking my commission the only dealings I had with the Government were financial—£50 for the purchase of kit. Now I'm off the track and must switch back. . . .<sup>1</sup> The Russian seems in the throes of a struggle between love and loyalty. He wants to be comrade to all the world, and at the same time to be loyal to his pact with the Allies. It's a mighty tough nut to crack. The mind of the Boche I don't understand at all. He appears to be just a swine. But that is mainly, I think, the ruling class, including the officer class; there is no outlet possible at present for popular thought. Certainly chaps who could stick that Messines Ridge pounding have got something in them mighty doughty and heroic.

I must away round the battery. . . .

*To his Wife.*

*June 28th, 1917.*

Last time I wrote I expected to be going shortly to the rest camp for forty-eight hours. But one of these oddments stunts has cropped up. We suddenly got orders to prepare to receive a new section (about sixty men) and to send a corresponding section of our own battery elsewhere. The new section has had no war experience and is about to be introduced to shell-fire by the process of dove-

<sup>1</sup> Deletion by Censor.



tailing. I went off in charge of our own section on a digging stunt. We have got to fix up emplacements for heavy guns which will shortly be arriving. Yesterday we spent in collecting material from various R.E. dumps, and transporting it by motor lorries to the gun position. To-day we have been demolishing with a view to creating. We shall probably be about a week on this stunt. The work itself would not take the time, but in a new area a good deal of time is wasted in finding (a) dumps, (b) officials in charge of them.

The new section at the battery started very unfortunately. They had three casualties, all wounded, but one seriously. P. had a marvellous escape. He was standing in a more forward position than any of the gun detachments. The Boche was very active yesterday, and put quite a lot of stuff over. I wasn't in the position as I was away with my section on the other job, and he left us undisturbed.

Last night I went back in a motor lorry to fetch some more kit, and got stranded there. My owl of a servant was under the impression that I had gone back in the motor car, and consequently cleared off with the swag directly he had collected it. When I came out from the B.C. post, where I had been to collect information about the afternoon's casualties, I found an empty road and no lorry in sight. Cookhouse informed me that it had left ten minutes previously. Altogether most regrettable. I had an appointment with the Brigade Major the following morning at 7.15 a.m. and had arranged to have the car at my new camp at 6.30.

There was nothing for it but to foot it the next morning. I went down to the Right Section, and fixed up my compass bearing to march on over the sandhills to the gun position. Slept on a shake-down in a dug-out and started off at 5 a.m. this morning. Had a charming trip till about 6.15, when it began to pelt. Made for a small farm-house and was lucky enough to find a Belgian and his wife having *café au lait* and bread and butter. Had a good snack there, lit my pipe and marched on. Country was quite open and very different to the stuff you and I negotiated in Sussex. Instead of taking bearings every 10 or 15 yards I only had to consult the compass about ten times. It led me very securely and landed me within 40 yards of the meeting-place.

*July 2nd.*

As the period of my Headship is drawing to a close I must try and get off a letter as soon as possible. . . . I believe July 26th is the date of my resignation, isn't it? I will try and snatch a couple of hours to-morrow morning in one of the dug-outs with a table up at the position. If I can find time to say (and the Boche doesn't worry too much) what I want to say, I should like each boy to have a copy of the letter. You could get it printed and sent out to me for signature. . . .

I guess you're having a horrid time, and will be glad to see the dawn of the day following the end of term. . . . I am very glad you have got Mother to yarn to. It's a very trying time, but I expect you'll have hearty laughs together over life's little ironies.



BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCES,

FRANCE,

July 3rd, 1917.

MY DEAR BOYS,—I wish I could be with you in person to say good-bye to you all, and to hand over my Headmastership to my successor. Instead, I'm writing from a dug-out, to the sound of guns, the sort of message I want you to have before Term ends. But although I am in a dug-out at the Front, I am picturing myself as sitting in my study at the College in the midst of surroundings of busy boyhood. I see the war potato field and the cricket pitch—the wickets casting a dark shadow in glaring contrast with the thin, white line of the block. Momentarily I think of the need of *camouflage* for concealing the position from the observation of hostile air-craft. Only for the moment. I'm back again in the study, and a bell, rather jaded and weary, has sounded the end of a period.

I've got one thing in particular to say to you all—just the main thing we've talked about together in its different bearings in the past—just the one important thing which keeps life sweet and clean and gives us peace of mind. It's a Christian thing, and it's a British thing. It's what the Bible teaches—it's what the Christian martyrs suffered persecution for. It soon found root in England and began not only to fill the land, but also to spread abroad and become the heritage of the Empire. It's the story of the Crusaders, of the Reformation, of the downfall of the power of Spain, of our colonisation, of the destruction of Napoleon's might, of the

abolition of slavery, and of the coming awakening of Germany. The thing is this : Playing the game for the game's sake.

Now I've had many opportunities in years gone by of having a talk with you about this, and I've always found that we've got a clear starting-off point. For whether I have been talking to a boy alone, or to a class in its class-room, or to the school met together in the New Hall, I have found opinion quite clear and quite decided as to what the game is and what the game is not. We've had a sure foundation. And the difficulty for us all consists, not in knowing what the game is, but in trying to live up to the standard of life which our knowledge of the game puts before us. Don't think that I am referring to the breaking of school rules. I am not. School rules don't live for ever, and, further, school rules suffer change. I am referring to deeper things than these—to rules which do live for ever and which do not suffer change. I am thinking of high honesty of purpose and of the word duty.

I'm going to tell you a story of something that happened at the College in days, I think, not within the memory of any of you. I pick this story because it illustrates well what I have said about school rule and deeper rule.

On a certain whole school day afternoon in the Lent Term some years ago, the Vth Form made a raid upon the IVth Form. The IVth barricaded themselves very securely in their own class-room by piling up desks and furniture against both doors. The raid was still in progress when I came along at half-past three to take the IVth in English. I

passed through the IIIrd, where there were evident symptoms of excitement, and came to the door of the IVth. The door wouldn't open. But my voice acting as a kind of "Sesame," the barricade was quickly removed and I entered. The classroom was pandemonium, desks littering the place in wild confusion, and in particular concentrated against the door opposite to that through which I had entered. I held a court of enquiry—pronounced judgment—went to the study for my cane and dealt with the IVth Form ringleaders on the spot. This, mind you, for a breach of school rule. Desks are not designed to be used for splinter-proof dug-outs. Now the enquiry showed clearly that though the IVth were guilty, they were not nearly so guilty as the Vth. So peace once more reigning in the IVth, I went along to the new hall to have a talk with the Vth. I told them what had happened—what punishment had been meted out to the IVth, and I said, "You've got the IVth into a row and you are the guiltier party of the two. I have caned the principal culprits in the IVth, and I shall be in the study at five o'clock and shall be glad to cane there those of you who feel you ought to turn up."

At five o'clock seven of them arrived and received their caning. Before they left I said to them, "I'm very proud of you chaps, and I've got to thank you for the first caning I've ever enjoyed giving."

They felt they ought to turn up. They did turn up. I need say no more.

One lives a good deal in the past out here—in

Memory Land—and in saying good-bye to you all and to your parents I should like you to know what it has been that has made my school life and school responsibilities so happy. In a few words it's just this: the solid support of you boys and of the generations of boys previous to you. It has always been a clear issue—yours and mine. We've pulled together and we've tried to make good. We've had a pretty keen understanding of each other, and a great affection for the College.

Ups and downs we've all struck, because trouble and perplexity none can avoid. It's the discipline of the good God. If we can't clear a fence we are no athletes; if we can't face misfortune we are poor Christians. But one thing has impressed me, and I would have it impress all of you, namely, that in this slippery, crooked, perverse, uphill, yet charming old world, we've all got something which nobody can take from us. That something is called Choice. We can choose this way: we can choose that way. We can choose what is right and have charm added to it, or we can choose what is wrong and lack that charm. And, though the right choice may land us on a slippery, crooked, perverse and uphill road, simply because it happens that that is the particular road where the game for the time being has to be played, yet through it all and in it all there's that inner something which I have called charm—an inner something which is our own and which becomes more splendidly our own as the years glide by. David puts it in a very beautiful way in Ps. 37. He says, "Keep innocency and take heed unto the thing that is right, for that shall

bring a man peace at the last." David, you see, tells the same old story. And what you've got to try and do when you leave school and go into the world, is to give full rein, undeterred by what others say and do, to that something within you which is your very own possession—taking heed unto the thing that is right, your Bible and Mother to guide you, and playing consistently with all your might and main the Game for the Game's great sake.

H. S. LAWSON,  
2nd Lieut., R.F.A., and  
Headmaster of Buxton College.

*July 5th, 1917.*

MOTHER MINE,—Many thanks for lots of good things that have arrived—letters, ear defenders, and tuck and what not. Ear defenders have been pouring in. Every fresh wave hurled them at my feet!

I think you've got a charming time-table for Rosem'ry's lessons. I'm so glad you find her so keen. I like your system of marks. It makes it more interesting, and induces, I think, sound judgment. . . .

Yes, the religious side at Q. sounds a bit sloppy. "The words of great teachers, and especially those of the greatest of all Teachers," seems to me to be a phrase designed primarily to be comprehensive. Let every parent be caught in the net. Mahomedans would find perfect safety in such a phrase. What particular views does the Headmaster himself



hold? Personally I feel that a school should have a school chapel. It is a thing we missed at Buxton, and I always looked forward to the building of one directly numbers justified it. . . .

*July 5th, 1917.*

MY DEAR OLD MAN,—Your new nib wrote me a capital letter. Next time I go into a town I shall try and find some Bible pictures for the album Grannie gave you.

A lot of the soldiers out here start their letters like this—"I hope this finds you in the pink, as it leaves me at present." It means, "I hope you are quite well," but it is a much more coloursome and fragrant way of putting it. It makes you think of Roses, Peonies and Rhododendrons.

How many runs have you been making lately at cricket? When you make ten in a game at school you can ask Mummie to get you a pair of cricket pads. You will have to keep them nice and clean, by putting whitening on them and leaving them in the sun to dry.

I have just finished making some emplacements for some big guns. They throw a shell weighing 270 lbs., which is about the weight of Grannie, Mummie, you, Rosem'ry and Michael. When the shell bursts it makes a hole nearly as big as the College swimming bath.

Lots of kisses from your loving

DADDY.

AN UNHEALTHY O.P.,

*To his Wife.**July 10th, 1917.*

I arrived at this unhealthy O.P. mainly by means of a long, dark, splinter-proof subway. This led out on to a street. The O.P. itself is the attic (or what was once upon a time an attic) of a tall, battered house. Here again once upon a time it was a house, but it wouldn't be recognised now as such by its owners. Gaping holes in the walls are filled up with sand-bags, and most of the woodwork, including the floors, has been used for making strong structural features. Access to the attic is by a series of ladders. A rope hangs down outside to enable the observer to escape, if the middle ladder is carried away by shell-fire. Everything is strewn with dust and ashes and débris, and the street outside is littered with shell fragments. I took possession of this charming bijou residence about half-past nine, and mounted the staircase with my telephonist. At the time a few shells were dropping in front of us, and to a flank, but most of the stuff was being flung on our trenches. The heavy *minenwerfer* were actively engaged in demolition work. The whole landscape visible resembled very much the mediæval pictures of hell fire—in the background a screen of curling white smoke; nearer at hand, burst of flame and angry eddying masses of black and yellow smoke. Add to this one unending din of pieces of all kinds of calibre and you've got a rough approximation of the landscape and the *tout ensemble*.

About ten o'clock the Boche began to bombard



severely the whole place. He made a direct hit on a house in front of us, and almost immediately afterwards another shell fell behind. The bracket was less than 70 yards. It was time to clear out from such an elevated vantage point, particularly as nothing was to be gained by staying there. Visibility was *nil*. So we cleared off to a basement near by, and here we stayed on and off till seven o'clock. I went up to the O.P. occasionally to see what was doing, but it was always the same desolate prospect of fire, smoke and trench demolition.

The racket and din have been prodigious, all sorts of stuff has been coming over. We've had the heavy-sounding crumps of the 5.9, the whizz-bang effect of the high velocity gun, and a plentiful supply of shrapnel bursting overhead. Every now and again a piece of a house went toppling down, and the acrid fumes of the bursting shells were wafted into the basement. Trench mortars were also very busy—*minenwerfers* as they are called. There is a steady roar going on from them in the neighbourhood of our first-line and reserve trenches. Well—well—he smiles best who smiles last. The Boche's time is coming and I expect he knows it. Preparations for modern battles cannot be concealed to any great extent. The principal element of surprise lies in the timing of the attack. It is curious how soon you get used to these things. The last heavy bombardment I was in was at Dickybush, near Ypres, when I was acting as liaison officer to a R.F.A. unit. It made much more impression on me than did this one, though this one was far the heavier of the two. This was a

solid eight hours of bombardment, followed later on by a gas bombardment of the battery position. At first these shell-bursts give you the feeling of irritability similar to that experienced when you bark your shin against some unseen obstacle—but after a time this feeling wears off, because bursts become a part of your mental surroundings. You reserve your irritability for the crash of a shell in your immediate neighbourhood, or for a whizz-bang, that is a gun, not a howitzer, which owing to its high velocity gives you no warning of its approach. Sound travels about 1,100 feet a second, and there is no howitzer existing which can give to its shell at the end of its flight a velocity as high as this.

Quite a number of houses have cracked in this neighbourhood, but little damage has been done to personnel.

I managed to get back to the battery about 7.30 p.m. during a sort of lull in the general proceedings. Soon after I arrived there gas shells began to fall thick and fast. It was like shelling peas. The burst of a gas shell is a dull boom followed by an oozy sort of noise due to liquid flying through the air. It was a poor night to attempt anything with gas, as there was a very strong wind blowing. But the Boche is the silliest of asses in many respects. He wanted to neutralise battery fire as far as possible whilst he carried out his own designs, and in consequence used gas. It had no effect. We continued to blow him sky-high with high explosive and to wreck the traffic on his roads. He caused me personally some inconvenience, as I was due to have forty-eight hours at rest camp.

He put up a barrage at two places on the road leading from our battery position to the rest camp, so that the ration lorry, in which I had intended to go, was unable to get up. I made my way back to my own dug-out, hugging corners and cover and biding my time for the open stretches, and went to bed in my top-boots, with gas helmet handy, and with quite an unreasonable faith in immunity from gas. Everybody else in the battery was up all night. I slept solid from twelve till half-past seven. I watched pretty carefully before turning in where the shells were falling, and I came to the conclusion that I could sleep and not sit up. I was off duty, and had nothing to worry about except gas. But tell the babies that I think my Guardian Angel disapproved the course I took. In the morning there was a little crater in the entrance to my dug-out where one gas shell had burst. Forward of this considerably, and near the guns, there were lots of little craters. But this particular one was just athwart the entrance. I shall take it as a warning that personal judgments are apt to be too optimistic.

*July 11th.*

Here I am at the rest camp dining comfortably to the sound of the "unplumb'd, salt, estranging—" and drinking *vin blanc*. It's very peaceful down here. I go back to the battery to-morrow night.

*July 12th.*

MY SWEET OLD FLICKERMAROOPIECE,—I have been sitting in an O.P. all night watching the German

lines. To get here I climbed up a hill, bending low when I got near the top. Soon I found a shutter in the ground. I opened this and went down into a dark hole, groping my way along as best I could. Instead of finding a dog with eyes as big as a round tower keeping watch over chests of money, I found telephone wires, and at the end of the passage an officer who was very tired of the dark hole, and who wanted to go home and get his dinner. At the end of the room where the officer was sitting I found a narrow slit giving me a view of the German lines. You see, I had walked under ground through the hill, and come out on the other side. If I had walked round the hill the Germans would have seen me, and might have put shrapnel over. Besides, even if I had gone round the front way I couldn't have got through the narrow slit window. If you had tried to climb through I expect your tummy would have caught.

In the O.P. there are lots of sand beetles ; they buzz at night and practise tricks jumping off the walls and ceilings.

In the room with the slit window you mustn't light a match, 'cause the Germans would see it.

Now I must tell you what happens in the night. Generally about ten o'clock when it begins to get dark the Boche sends up flares and rockets from his trenches. He thinks some of our soldiers may be camping out in the darkness over No Man's Land to raid his trenches and blow up his dug-outs. The flares and rockets are very pretty. It's like having fireworks every night.

All the time I am watching through a telescope

for gun flashes. If I see any I telephone back to the battery. Then our guns can fire on the battery making the flashes and destroy their guns. . . . I started this letter a long time ago, but it got lost. . . .

Give Robin and Micky fat kisses from me.—Much love from your loving

DADDY.

*July 25th, 1917.*

MOTHER MINE,—It's quite time I wrote you a yarn. It has been very charming to hear about the sayings of Rosem'ry and about her arguments concerning the goodness of the Lord. I'm so glad her reading is going on so well.

Here I am in the rest camp for forty-eight hours. It was very gorgeous last night getting out of one's clothes into a real bed and listening to silence. There was an occasional rumble from a distant big gun, and that was all.

Sunday, July 22nd, will be more firmly fixed in my memory even than June 7th, the Messines day. I had got into pyjamas that night—I don't usually when I am at the battery—as things had been quiet since eight o'clock, and the wind was such that a gas attack was unlikely. However, at 1 a.m. there were three heavy detonations in rapid succession. We were being shelled with long-range guns. (Shelling with a gun is very different from shelling with a howitzer. I have explained this in previous letters.) I got up and had a look round the section. No damage had been done. We waited a bit, and then the night ammunition fatigue



went on with its work. Half an hour later the same gun fired four more rounds, killing one man and wounding three. We got them into a dug-out and sent round to the R.A.M.C. people for assistance. Fortunately there was a pause in the shelling, and we were able to get the wounded away in peace and quietness. About 2 a.m. heavy shelling recommenced both from guns and howitzers and went on steadily till 4.30. I had sent the ammunition fatigue party to dug-outs and no further casualties took place. About a quarter to four a shell set fire to a limber, also to a shanty in which were stored cartridges, tubes and fuses. I collected a party and we managed between shell bombs to get the fire put out before the flames had got hold of the cartridges. The limber was badly damaged and will have to be renewed. During the period fortunately shells were dropping short. The shanty was protected by a bit of a crest, which protected the workers from flying splinters. Having got the fire under I went to the telephone dug-out to report. Having done this I intended warily to proceed to my own dug-out some 50 yards away. With me were three of the working party. Crash went a shell just in front of us. We all made a wild dive for the ground, with a general mixing up of legs and heads. It was a good bit of drill. Who was down first I don't know, but in that short second which elapsed between the sound of the shell and the flying débris we all got there. Shell splinters hit the dug-out, but nothing was within a couple of feet of the ground level. The entrance to the dug-out is narrow and we were all standing together.



We all made a heavy downward plunge in the direction of the dug-out, and all found a sort of floor below the point of impact of the shell fragments. About 5 a.m. the shelling of the battery stopped. The guns were turned on to the road and to a neighbouring battery. At 10 a.m. we had orders to carry out an important aeroplane shoot. However, as has frequently been the case this last month, the heavens were creeping with Boche planes, but not one of ours visible. Now when Boche planes are up it is customary to cover up your guns, wait till the Archies have driven them off, or our own fighting planes have dispersed them. If you fire your guns with Boche planes about, the life of the guns is likely to be a short one. We covered up the guns as usual. But a little later orders came through from the G.O.C. that the shoot must take place and that we must put up a smoke screen. Thereupon I set to work to collect a party to make a smoke screen, giving orders to Nos. 1 (sergeants at the guns) to pick up near auxiliary aiming points as they would be unable to see the distant ones when the smoke cloud was going. Now we don't keep spare men in the section for this sort of job. I had to draw on the specialists. I put the Staff-Sergeant Artificer in command and gave him the two cook's mates, my own servant, the wheeler, a spotter (chap who spots aeroplanes with telescope) and one of the telephonists. I gave them three hundred smoke bombs and showed them the area up wind where the curtain of smoke should start. Soon after this a dense white smoke floated down upon us and the shoot commenced. We carried on with

a few pauses up to 8.30 p.m. and then got the order to empty guns, and cease firing. Most of the day there was desultory shelling of the position and a certain amount of shrapnel fire. But we had no more casualties. At 10.30 p.m. R. arrived from the rest camp and relieved me. I slept so soundly that I heard nothing whatever of the S.O.S. firing which took place from 3 a.m. to 4 a.m. on Monday morning.

Says a Psalm for that day, "O that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness." Rosem'ry would read it all right, but Daddy in the smoke cloud found the quotation a trifle humorous. The composition of the bombing party afforded a good deal of amusement in the battery. The Staff Sergeant Artificer, you must remember, is very much a specialist. He's the gun expert on the mechanical side and holds a rather exalted position in a battery. Again, the wheeler is a carpenter and is never called upon to perform odd jobs. He's never dreamt of such a thing as sitting on the ground between a brace of cook's mates and letting off smoke bombs. However, they all did their job very well. Sometimes the smoke would get too dense, and away from a gun position would come the cry, "No. 1 not ready, Sir, aiming post obscured." Whereupon I would bellow back, "Easy with the smoke screen."

Since then we've had a gun knocked out, not badly, but necessitating repairs which will take about a week.

The general situation here is the reverse of what we found at Messines. There we were a reinforcing battery arriving when there was already a consider-

able concentration. Here we were one of the first batteries in the field. We were put in a forward position, which was also unfortunately an exposed position, to carry on and pump metal into Boche trenches till the necessary concentration was effected. We have now got permission to find a more normal position further back, if such can be found. The General told the Major yesterday that we had done our job and that there was no further need for us to remain where we were. So I hope we shall be able to move out shortly to a more normal howitzer position.

The unhealthy O.P. about which I wrote has crashed. A direct hit took away the two top storeys and filled the remainder of the house with débris. Nobody was in it at the time.

I have got a munition trophy in my dug-out in an 11-inch gas shell which fell just above our position the other night. It took a party of six men with a drag-rope to haul it in. It must weigh well over 500 lbs. It is empty, of course. The fuse was blown out on impact and the gas escaped. The shell itself did not splinter.

B. has sent me the prospectus of Q. school. It reads well, and the instructional side seems to have been very carefully thought out. It gives no information whatever about the Staff, so it's rather difficult to judge from the prospectus what sort of place it is. I find one whole page of the cover devoted to the following inscription: "Labour, Art, Worship, Love, these make men's lives." True enough for some sort of men and women, but is it the right sort? I've no use personally for labour

except as a means to an end. Similarly I've got to put into my stomach the raw material for the working of brain and heart. But neither stomach nor labour figures ideally front in the school hierarchy. . . . It's getting late, and my bed, a real bed, looks very inviting. I'm so glad you've been with Janet this last month. I shall be very glad when the preliminaries of the move south are fixed. . . .

*To his Wife.*

*July 26th.*

. . . I have written Mother about battery doings of late. If the move takes place it will probably be the Right Section only ; that is the section R. and I are in charge of. We have had the worst of it all through. The Left Section have got a decent position, well protected, and the B.C. post where the Major and the Captain live is a strong dug-out more or less shell-proof against anything up to a 5.9. I fancy the Boche treated us lightly because he was persuaded that guns could not possibly be in such a position. . . .

To-day, I believe, is the last day of my Headmastership at the College. It will make a big gap in your life for a bit, until you get used to private life existence. But it's a great relief that a decent chap is taking it over. . . . You've done extraordinarily well at the College, and you will realise more and more, day by day, in the changes and chances of mortal life, how much you have profited by your experience of the last nineteen months.

*July 28th.*

I'm sitting in the wilderness in charge of operations for a new position. We are all living in a state of most complete piggery. Life generally has some resemblance to the desert trips I used to take in Egypt, but on those occasions one had the luxury of a competent servant, and immunity from shell-fire. I see quite a good deal of the "unplumb'd" one which wonders in a placid way what all the pother is about. Things are turning up daily. It's rather a grand spectacle at night when firing is heavy or when an S.O.S. comes through. Add to the vocabulary I gave you "Pip-squeaks." These are gas shells. They don't detonate loudly but just pip. After that there is a squeaky ooze due to escaping gas under pressure. R. is due to relieve me to-night. I shall get a bath and a shave before going up to the O.P. on the night watch. . . . My working party had to disperse this morning to crannies, nooks and shelters, as rubbish was flying about pretty thickly. Batteries and walls on our right and left were being shelled with heavy stuff, and we came in for the outer zone fragments of each stunt. This afternoon things are a bit quieter. Ordinarily, when light is good, the Boche does the bulk of the damage in the morning, we in the afternoon and evening. Observation is better when the sun is behind you. . . .

We've had a particularly beastly July, but I have great hopes that August may show the goodly fruits thereof. I remember when I first came up here, I said that the position was such as I should



have chosen had the War Office given me *carte blanche* in the matter. Since then I've changed my mind.

You saw in the papers, I expect, that the King had been out here. I didn't actually see him, but I felt his august presence. The traffic on all useful roads was held up from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., just as I was proceeding from one place to another in a motor lorry with a fatigue party.

July 31st.

Says a Psalm for the 30th day of the month, "Yea, a joyful and pleasant thing it is to be thankful." R. and I had spent most of yesterday fixing up things in our new position preparatory to moving the guns on. About 7 p.m. we started off to make tracks for the Mess. As we got to a crest we saw that the Boche was heavily shelling the old Right Section. So we waited a bit outside the danger area until he had finished. When I got back to my dug-out I found things in wild disarray—a cup and a plate on the floor, sand on the table, and a couple of candles on the bed. I then looked up at the ceiling and found that a 3-inch plank was split nearly in half, and that the pit-props supporting the timber had got a slight outward lean. I went outside and then saw the mischief. There was a big hole in the sand-bagged pit-prop roof, and one of the pit-props, 10 inches in diameter, had been cut clean in half. The base of the hole reached as far as the platform composing the ceiling. Beyond shell shock, which would have been con-



siderable, no damage would have been done to anybody in the dug-out. It was a 5.9-shell Howitzer, weighing about 100 lbs., and very similar to our 6-inch Howitzer stuff. Very lucky escape, wasn't it? Curiously enough I had said to R. a few days ago, "I wish we could get a decent hit on one of the dug-outs. We should then know how to build them, and what amount of material is necessary to keep out a 5.9."

Anything bigger than 5.9 one can't hope to keep out. It means such a lot of material and concrete, etc., as well as labour. The Navy expects from 12 to 15 feet of concrete, and get it. They also get fresh meat daily, rum, and a lb. of tobacco a month. They are luxurious dogs altogether.

I am sitting up in our O.P. writing. There is no visibility of any sort, so it's no good gazing through the shutter at Boche misery. We are putting a lot of stuff over on to their trenches. Shells keep whistling merrily overhead safely bound for spots quite distant from my head. Occasionally one comes over with a loose copper driving band. It screams like a cat in the middle of the night.

REST CAMP,  
*Aug. 2nd.*

. . . I said good-bye yesterday to our old position of the last five weeks with no sentiments of affection whatever. It's quite a nice piece of country as country goes, but a vile gun position. It's pitted with craters and shell débris. My last act there was to bury the 11-inch shell I wrote you

about. Some day if all goes well we will come over and dig it up and convoy it home in your hat-box! It weighs 400 or 500 lbs.

Mother's purple kimono sounds gorgeous. You will find it very comforting as well as good to look at. I expect the babies love it, don't they? I'm so glad the Boys and Staff gave you such a nice presentation. I've had very nice letters from Miss P. and from C.

August 4th, 1917.

Here's a bit of sunshine for a change, giving us a chance of drying our wet clothes and of getting cheerful. In this bad weather the men are in very evil plight, as their kit is not too plentiful. . . . You ask how I'm sticking the show. I'm quite fit, love, and war-weary only at times. One cannot, of course, do anything in the way of criticism of men and matters. My views in general have not altered very much during the last three months, and R., who has been out in France for nine months previous to coming out with the battery, is in general agreement with me. The censorship business is altogether mysterious. Hilaire Belloc, for instance, has published recently in *Land and Water* an article containing information which no conscientious officer out here would dream of giving.

I think the most abidingly unpleasant part of the war on the personal side is being a Subaltern at forty-one. Shell-fire is mighty unpleasant, but that's the portion of all combatant branches of the army. It can't be avoided. But the other thing sticks—the feeling, I mean, that you've not got the

position in the machine which you ought to have, and since you've got to be at the top of your form to be constantly smiling inwardly, it is easy to understand how it happens that there are periods of war-weariness.

The ear defenders are quite good but rather uncomfortable to wear for any length of time. But when close to the guns I always wear them.

*August 9th, 1917.*

MY SWEET OLD FLICKERMAROOPIECE,—I've been living in such a funny ramshackle old place. . . . It has got sand-bags on the top of it to keep out pieces of shell—Boche shells—not the shells we like to play with when we go to the seaside. The sand-bags are all decayed and full of rats and noisome insects. The rats come out at night and play Leap-frog, and Ring of Roses, and grub about, trying to find some food. But as I keep all the food in a nice air-tight cartridge box the rats have to go back to their sand-bag homes, hungry and dejected.

I have now built a new little house with clean sand-bags, and am sleeping in it to-night for the first time. It is in a lovely place, but a man called the Censor would tear his hair out if I told you much about it. You see war is mysterious and secret, like underground passages, where giants and dogs with eyes as big as saucers live. Out here, instead of saying, "I live at S. Chad's Cottage, Speldhurst," you would take a map out of your pocket and say, "My pin point is B. 17, a. 37, 95." Everybody at war talks in this silly way.

We are taking lots of Germans every day, and perhaps by this time next year there won't be many left. Then we shall all be able to come home and sing hymns like Miriam did when the Egyptians were all drowned in the Red Sea. . . .

*To his Wife.*

*August 15th, 1917.*

My new house is also getting on nicely. I have got some shelves up, also some window slits facing the "unplumb'd" S.E., and a real door. The floor is boarded, and the whole place is fairly rat-proof. I wish it were mosquito-proof. This place creeps with mosquitoes, and although we singe them regularly with candles every night the supply keeps up. R. has gone into a town to-day in the car to get a few oddments, amongst them a bit of fancy rag of sorts, to give a bit of tone to the dug-out. White-wash has arrived, so to-morrow we shall have the inside of the iron cupolas composing the framework all begarnished. One calls it a dug-out, but it isn't in reality, as it is all above ground, protection being afforded to the inside cupola by means of sand-bags and pit-props. It is a charming little property—very healthy, with dry subsoil, and the room itself will shortly be not only rain-proof but also light-proof and gas-proof.

We had a nasty gas attack on the night of the 13th, lasting for about quite a couple of hours. Nobody was any the worse for it beyond losing a night's rest, but there are things one doesn't forget. And now that we've got the gunpower the Boche is made to suffer in a variety of ways for his lack

of any sense of decency in warfare. His High Command is a swine—such gifts as it possesses, and they are considerable, are merely “jewels of gold in the swine’s snout.” . . .

*August 16th, 1917.*

MY DEAR OLD MAN,

My little house, which is not quite so big as the linen room at Buxton, is getting on beautifully. In the middle of it I can just stand upright. I have a lovely view in front, and, however much it rains, the soil all round my house is never muddy. I wonder what I ought to call the house? I think you and Rosem’ry must think of a name for it and then I will get the “wheeler” (that is really the name for a carpenter) to make a little board and paint the name of the house on it. So when you have thought of a good name send it out on a post-card to me, and I will have it put over the front door, and have a special call in Morse Code fixed up for it, and then when you write you can put the name of the house on the address in brackets above the battery address. House agents would call this place “A Charming Little Bijou Residence.”

Has Mummie told you yet about the different sorts of guns—whizz bangs, crumps, Archies and pip-squeaks. Funny names, aren’t they? Yesterday we had some heavy shells over which we called Grandmothers. They made enormous holes in the ground, like swimming baths. Nobody was hurt by them, and to-day the Germans have been punished severely for their effrontery in sending



over such ugly Grandmothers. I expect the German Grandmother is a dreadful old person, not a bit like our Grannies, who have resplendent virtues.

We are killing lots of Germans every day, and soon I hope they will become extinct, like those ugly great Saurian reptiles we saw at the Kensington Museum.

Now I must go round the battery and get people to work on their different jobs. . . .

Don't forget to send out a nice name for my little house. You and Rosem'ry might paint it on cardboard, and then I could tack the cardboard on the front door.

*To his Wife.*

*August 17th.*

. . . The political situation at home is rather disquieting. I read Henderson's abridged speech in the *Daily Mail* and shall be glad to see if it reads any better in the *Times*. It struck me as being lame and dishonest. Both the Stockholm conference and the peace suggestions of that wastrel Benedict were engineered in Berlin. How any sane man can want to confer anywhere about peace at the present time beats me altogether.

Shell-fire and plenty of it—cold steel and gas—these should be our only dealings with the Germans for another year. Next spring I suppose we shall have a strong American Army in the field, fresh and keen and profiting from the experiences of the other belligerents. That ought to do the job even if Russia is still chaotic. I look to see Anglo-Saxons finishing the war, if their Governments



don't play the giddy goats. Not that I don't admire the deeds of the French and Italians. . . .<sup>1</sup> I hope Lloyd George realises his strength and has not lost touch, in the appalling and consuming variety of his duties, with real public opinion at home. I don't like the new appointments—Churchill at munitions and Haldane on business arrangements after the war, but Barnes ought to be sound in the inner War Cabinet. I should like to see the House of Commons strengthened by the inclusion in it of seventy or eighty of its members on active service. I believe they would be more useful there now than anywhere else. Probably a good half of them have not combatant jobs, so might well be spared for House of Commons duties; they would be able to preach the doctrine of Owen Seaman: "Consider the 'orrible state of the Boche." And any conference there may be would be well employed in cogitating on the matter and devising steps to make his state not only 'orrible but abominable and beastly. . . .

*August 17th, 1917.*

MY DEAR OLD MAN,—I hope you have had a nice time at S. Chad's. I shall expect to hear all about it soon in your diary; I think there must be a fat piece due to come along. Yesterday a German aeroplane tried to drop some bombs on one of our hospitals. It did manage to drop two bombs, but it missed the hospital. Our aeroplane went up and fought it and brought it down crash. If we could keep on doing this perhaps we could teach the Germans not to drop bombs on hospitals.

<sup>1</sup> Deletion by Censor.

Sometimes in the night when we know the Germans are working on their railway or carrying up shells to their guns we fire what is called a salvo. Lots of guns are fired at the same second and lots of shells come crashing down unexpectedly on the German working parties. Sometimes we make great holes in their roads so that they can't use them, and sometimes we drop bombs on their trains and aeroplane sheds. Sometimes we want to know what kind of Germans are in the trenches opposite to us. Then the infantry go over and bomb their dug-outs, and haul the Germans out by the scruff of the neck and march them back to prison.

There is a lovely sunset to-night—great clusters of gold-tipped clouds with a pinky-green haze beneath them.

It is nice of the sun to give his gold away to the cloud before he goes to Beddie Byes.

Lots of kisses from your loving

DADDY.

*To his Wife.*

*Aug. 18th.*

It's nice to feel that you've really got a habitable house now and that every day is adding to its complete befurbishment. . . .

A splendid assortment of papers round this morning—*Times* (2), *Land and Water*, *Punch* and *Truth*. I pass these on to the men when I have finished with them. I think it would be rather nice if Robin and Rosem'ry adopted our Right and Left Section Telephone Dug-outs. Robin might send a couple of magazines weekly to the Right

and Rosem'ry to the Left. The telephonists have long hours on duty, with considerable periods, particularly at night, of nothing doing, and magazines and papers would be much appreciated. The men like the ordinary magazine stuff, with short stories and plenty of illustrations. *The Strand*, *Pearson's*, etc., would be the sort they would like. . . . Light reading matter is always scarce in a battery. The babies could choose the magazines themselves and vary them. They could write a line to the telephonists and instruct that the magazines when finished were to be passed on to the O. Pip telephonists and thence to the B.C. Post telephonists. B.C. stands for Battery Commander. . . . Michael might adopt the linesmen who are engaged in repairing wire. Their job is a dangerous one as repairs often have to be done under shell-fire. However, they get quite a bit of time off and would find something to read very comforting. One of our linesmen has just won the Military Medal, so the magazine might be addressed to him, with instructions that the other linesmen must also have the use of it. Time to censor letters. . . .

*August 19th.*

MOTHER MINE,—Many thanks for the West Country parcel, which arrived safely yesterday. We are devouring all the good things with much relish, but you mustn't waste all your substance on my riotous living. R. and I had just finished a Bath chap Janet sent out, but we're quite in the mood to tackle another. The place has been creep-

ing with Generals the last two days. We had one over the position yesterday and a couple this morning. They seemed quite pleased with the position. . . .

We've been up here just over two months now, have been in action every day, and have never been visited by a parson. Corps artillery doesn't seem to figure in the scheme of things spiritual. Sunday out here is generally selected by the Hun for heavy attempts at frightfulness. The early hours of Sunday morning are his favourite time for gas attacks. All days are so alike that it's very difficult to keep count of days of the week and month. . . . Every night at this time one makes sure that the guns are laid on S.O.S. lines, ready, that is, to support the infantry if they signal for assistance. It's rather magnificent at night to see the response. One is on night O.P. duty watching our lines for S.O.S. signals. Suddenly the signal goes up. Immediately one telephones it down to the battery, and within a minute a host of batteries is deluging the Boche first line, reserve trenches and communications with high explosive.

So the work goes on. We are steadily educating the Hun by undermining his morale, and if civilian opinion stands firm, the day will surely come when a movement here or a movement there will set the whole edifice a-tottering. Here comes the cook for the post. I hope you'll find your room snug at Tunbridge Wells. . . .

*August 20th, 1917.*

MY SWEET LUMPS,—I had two lovely surprises yesterday. First of all I got a postcard with a picture on it of a sprig of white heather. Suddenly the middle of it fell open, and Hey, Presto! before I could say "take cover," twelve lovely pictures of Tunbridge Wells fell out of it on a long string. I then picked up another postcard with a picture on it of Dino playing the drum; suddenly the drum burst open, and Hey, Presto! before I could say "fire number one gun," another long string of pictures of Tunbridge Wells dropped out. I have now got the magic postcards pinned up on the wall of my dug-out. The two I like best are the Toad Rock and the High Rocks. I expect you make excursions to them and find also lots of other lovely places to explore. To-morrow I have got some British West Indians—people with black faces and rather greasy noses—coming to help me build dug-outs and gun positions. They are coming here in a motor lorry. Sometimes they come to carry shell for us from the road to the battery position. I wonder if their faces are black all the way through or whether it is only on the outside; what do you and Rosem'ry think? . . .

Such a sad thing happened yesterday. Our little battery dog—called Steeny—died of shell shock. A shell fell just outside the cook-house and though Steeny didn't get hit the noise of the shell bursting was so great that it killed him.

We punished the Germans by sending 150 of our shells into the middle of them. Perhaps that will



teach their High Command not to kill poor little dogs.

I hope you and Rosem'ry are very good and obey orders from Nurse very promptly. When people are slow in obeying orders they get sloppy and lose backbone, that is what has happened this year to the Russians. The consequence is the Germans are pushing them back and taking lots of prisoners. But a man called Kerensky is working hard to get them back in the good old state of mind they were in before they thought of disobeying orders. I expect next year they will have seen the error of their ways and will march boldly to victory by promptly obeying orders.

Has Mummie bought any Kia Ora Lemon Squash yet? It is lovely stuff. It is better than ginger beer by as much as cherry tart is better than sloppy semolina.

A fat kiss to Michael from each of you, one on each cheek.—Your loving

DADDY.

*To his Wife.*

*August 24th.*

. . . There's quite an autumnal effect about these evenings and visibility for shooting begins to get poor about 7.30.

The Major asked me yesterday to take over the Left Section, so I've begun work on it to-day. As a matter of fact we are a bit wasted—R. and I together in the Right Section. It's a wastage of good material. That, of course, is a mere personal opinion, but I haven't altered my views about myself since I

left England, and I should be quite prepared to tackle what Major S. of Horsham suggested to the great disgust of the Powers that be in Lydd.

The Major is putting my name forward for promotion to Captain, but don't expect anything to happen (1) quickly, (2) at all.

Wheels move very slowly and occasionally stop altogether for lengthy periods at recognised or unrecognised halting-places.

Now I must go my rounds. I may find time to add to this later.

*Sept. 12th.*

Still no news of leave. I am going in the car to-morrow to make enquiries as to hitches.

You raise the question of temptations apropos of Robin—the illustrated papers and diary. To my mind it falls in the domain of psychology of habit. A successful blow struck in a certain direction leaves a mental path which outcrops, so to speak, in subconscious action when similar conditions are renewed. Hence a successful effort would strengthen the performer against enemy onslaught in the same direction. But inasmuch as effort involving nervous energy has been used up in repulse, some weakening of energy must be looked for, should it be necessary to make a stand against some immediate subsequent temptation.

When I make up my mind to write a diary in face of the temptation to gaze at aeroplane photographs, I lose a certain amount of nervous energy. Immediately afterwards my little sister drops her bed-time choccie in the pig tub. My own is intact

and uneaten. Shall I share it, or shall I hog the whole kaboodle? Generosity very dimly rampant says, "Share it," natural man blatantly rampant says, "It's your own, eat it all yourself." I eat it. That is, having successfully slaughtered devil No. 1 of type 1, I find myself weakened to withstand the onslaught of devil No. 2 of type 2. At the same time I find myself in merry mood the following day to withstand the onslaught of that silly ass of a devil, who expects me to drop a diary in face of an aeroplane. That's my experience. At the same time the problem is always complicated by the presence of the Rip Van Winkle who says, "I won't count it this time." He's a far more insidious personality than the devil himself—the traditional Devil I mean—since he is, in fact, a phase of proper devilry.

It's getting late and I must turn in. We've had a howling gale to-day with things relatively quiet. But my eyes are full of sand and rather sleepy.

## CHAPTER IV

### LETTERS FROM FRANCE

SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 1917

In September he was at home on leave from the 16th to the 25th. The following letter was written on his way out.

PIER HOTEL, FOLKESTONE,

*To his Wife.*

*Sept. 26th.*

. . . I got up to Town an hour late, having been held up near Cowden for some time. Comfortable room at Hotel. Saw R. at the Victoria Hotel and gave him the general news.

Well, it's been a very lovely little holiday. "May the changes and chances of this blinking world," as the curate puts it, be responsible for my getting leave again in four or five months' time. Please congratulate the Vicar from me on the excellence of the epithet as applied to these troublous times. I am taking it that the epithet emanates from Head-quarters.

The boat does not leave till 1.30 p.m., so I shan't get back to the battery position to-night. I, like Robin, have had a "schooly" morning. I've been wandering round Folkestone revisiting old haunts—our hotel of August 4th and the C. Schools. The old buildings near the theatre are not very much

altered. I found the window through which I hurled a bottle of ammonium sulphide (a poisonous smelling liquid) into the theatre, and the fence at the back over which I and my companions beat a hurried retreat when the deed was done. I can still see the scene, the excited exit of people from the theatre, which we witnessed as we walked slowly past the main entrance, having safely regained Trinity Road on the other side of the fence. . . .

It was a weird school, but I'm not sure that I didn't learn more there than anywhere else. It was quite a little world in its way, comprising all sorts and conditions of characters.

E. and F. saw me off this morning at 7.30. They went back to breakfast afterwards at Rubens Hotel.

*Michaelmas Day, 1917.*

This is Michael's day. I hope he has lived up to his responsibilities and has been invoking the angelic choir in hymnal praise.

This place compares very unfavourably with Tunbridge Wells, but it's comforting to feel that the Boche is having a real horrid time and is sore perplexed.

I've been busy to-day "gingering up" things generally in the Left Section. There seems to have been a bit of stagnation since I went on leave.

There's a wonderful moon to-night and great aeroplane activity. The bus bomb service is running gaily, and useless frightfulness is in full vigour. I've been censoring letters all the evening and feel very sleepy. . . .



*September 30th, 1917.*

The Boche has been very busy with his usual Sunday Hymn of Hate. He gives one little time for writing letters. He is feeling vicious now that he can envisage a future of defeat, bankruptcy and disgrace. What an appalling fate to have been born a Boche. . . .

I am settling down comfortably into the atmosphere here again.

Coming back immediately from home one finds the place lacks charm. It's all so drab and sordid, but one soon settles down into the routine of an upside-down world.

*October 7th, 1917.*

I am sitting in bed in my dug-out, having just had my back rubbed with eau-de-Cologne and massaged. You can't buy oils in this country, so they, the natives, recommend eau-de-Cologne, of which there appears to be a huge quantity available. The stuff is manufactured in Paris, so bang goes another of the Hun industries. Truth to tell, winter anticipated me. I got a bit of a chill several days ago up in the O.P. at night, and it has found the weak spot, but I am quite comfortable and merely twingy. I shall get the doctor to look in to-morrow. He may have stores of oil of some sort—paraffin or petrol and eau-de-Cologne are the only liquids generally available, and of them the last is distinctly the pleasantest. The winter here is going to be distinctly grizzly; I must find occupation of some sort for evening hours, I might try

writing. There is plenty of local colour—or lack of colour—and romance I suppose, if one looks far enough afield. The worst of writing is the laboriousness of the job, my thoughts always outstrip my pen. A further trouble would be to find the proper meaning of things that can be said. I must cogitate. I am afraid Mrs R. is feeling this strain of air raids. . . . Raiding by night, provided a sufficient elevation is kept, is such an easy matter, and since frightfulness appears to be the Boche's main object in these latter days he can attain comparative immunity whilst still effecting a lot of non-military damage. But I think we shall stagger the civilian population if we carry out a system of wholesale reprisals. It is a bad business altogether—and just as he curses the day when he used gas, so he will in the course of time curse the policy which resulted in air frightfulness. Smuts' speech was very cheery, wasn't it? I hope his remarks on the submarine business are justified by facts. We have had a wild spell of weather lately—gales, torrents of rain and thunder-storms. But all the while the Boche is being steadily shoved off the Passchendaele Ridge into the greasy plain beyond. The squelchy mud is a fit companion for the thing he calls his soul. . . .

My dug-out is wonderfully dry; it's had a good testing lately. There is a sufficiency of sand-bags on the top to prevent the rain getting through to the roof proper. It's really quite snug in bad weather, though, of course, very dark and cramped. The Medical Orderly is due to give me a rub, so I will finish off.

*October 11th.*

I am pretty well fit again now. I have had quite an active day without feeling any the worse for it. I shall avoid O.P. work for a couple of days. . . .

I have been up to our new O.P. this afternoon, but nothing was visible as a heavy drizzle set in almost immediately after I got there. However, it acted as a sort of constitutional jaunt, and I feel quite fit to-night after a two-mile tramp over the dunes.

Everybody is particularly cheery out here these days. The Boche is getting it in the neck and his domestic affairs are none too comfortable. Did you see that narrative from a captured German's letter? After writing in praise of everything English—English artillery, English aircraft, English submarines—he finished up, "The English will soon be leading Hindenburg with a ring through his nose." It was fortunate for the writer I fancy that the document fell into our hands rather than into those of his own countrymen. If the Fleet mutiny is true some seamen in that direction will soon be writing in a similar strain of old Tirpitz. They would make a pretty pair in a triumphal procession down Piccadilly. We are getting proper drizzling autumn weather—raining occasionally. But the offensive seems to be going on splendidly in the South, and it is a clammy, dark, muddy winter that the Boche has in store for him.

MY DEAR OLD MAN,—It was nice to get fat diaries from you and Rosem'ry yesterday. I expect you

will soon like the new school, even better than the old one. It is always rather strange and perplexing to go into a new world with lots of people in it, when you have been living in an old world—the nicest world in the world—with only a few people in it.

Once upon a time in English history there was a prince fighting in an English Army commanded by his Daddy. Everybody wanted to help the prince when he was fighting the enemy's seasoned warriors, but his Daddy said, "No, let the boy win his own spurs." So they left him alone; and afterwards he fought with great prowess against the enemy and swamped them. That is the sort of thing that happens in schools. Boys have to walk on their own legs, and make their own friends, and establish their own reputation, in the place which seems to be quite complete without them. Sometimes it is like fitting a new piece into a puzzle picture which looks as if it were already complete and finished. But this sort of picture is really not complete and finished. There is always room for other pieces and fresh colour comes into it; no picture can ever be quite perfect. When you have been a little while at school in the big new world you will find a place of your own in the picture which will grow more and more beautiful, complete and perfect according as you and others wish it. Next summer Rosem'ry will be going I expect into a new world, and will have to find a place in the puzzle picture of a girls' school. . . .

To his Wife.

October 17th, 1917.

I have been up at O.P. all day doing shoots. It is a very unpleasant journey to and fro, same sort of life that David lived when he was constantly being chased in the wilderness by Saul, and a bit ear-splitting when you are up there. The Boche knows the O.Ps. pretty well and besprinkles them plentifully with H.E. However, I smashed in one of his houses this afternoon—snug-looking billet it looked before I started—so somebody is going to be comfortless to-night. Some of the snuggest little hamlets are outside our range, so we have to leave them for other batteries, whose range is longer, to tackle. But I marked down to-day a pretty little farm-house, nestling peacefully in trees which looked like an orchard, and I hope to crash it before the week is out. It might well be somebody's Head-quarters. It will need a day of good visibility as the terrain in that neighbourhood is thin. Trench shoots don't interest me very much. You may smash up a sector of a trench, but it is very soon rebuilt again, while the isolated houses in back areas are not easily rebuilt, for they nearly always harbour staff people of sorts. It is an amazing stupid sort of life, but when there is no other sort of life available the only thing you can do is to "out-stupid" the stupid.

October 19th.

I have just had *petit déjeuner* in bed—a large omelette, bread, butter, jam, and a large pot of *café au lait*. I'm now smoking a pipe of peace



preparatory to moving off to the battery about twelve o'clock and getting on with the war. This is a peaceful back area small town. I have taken twenty-four hours from the battery in order to get a real walk, a real bed, and space wherein to move. It's very pleasant to be in a room where you can stand upright without knocking your head on an iron ceiling, and equally pleasant to be able to walk abroad without being tripped up by telephone wire. I've been able to walk across country forgetful of cover, shell-holes and trenches, in the full knowledge that I shall not have to make a sudden dive to earth in replying to the warning note of an arriving shell.

I had a gorgeous walk yesterday over dune country, and found myself at times in little forests of low barberry bushes. It was a perfect autumn afternoon, bright sunshine, cold wind and good visibility.

I can't quite make out this new German move in the Gulf of Riga ; it seems to me it must be mainly political. It's the sort of job that will employ a portion of the fleet and keep it out of mischief and disaffection, whilst offering opportunity to the High Command for issuing communiqués which will hearten the civil population. Incidentally, it may give our submarines a chance of bagging a few useful ships and sending them to the place where they should be. I don't believe Germany can raise enough divisions to do the job properly, *i.e.* to occupy Reval and advance on Petrograd.

I think Robin would like that chapter in the Epistle of the Hebrews dealing with faith—par-

ticularly the latter half of it ; he would probably have a mighty lot of questions to ask about it, so you might need to refer to contexts before embarking on the venture. I should give him the definition in verse one and then pass on pretty quickly to the generalities. I'll look it up in my Bible when I get back.

*October 23rd, 1917.*

I fancy I have not told you lately of stunts my name has gone forward for. They are roughly as follows :—

(1) For promotion to lieutenant. This has gone to the War Office, so it is only a matter of finding its way from Cubby hole to Cubby hole, and office to office. Expect to see the fruits in about six months' time.

(2) For a captaincy in a battery. This sits in an office out here waiting for opportunity to offer, on the changes and chances of the waste-paper basket.

(3) For an ordnance job, which would require some months' training at home, pretty heavy competition here—Army Council to F.M. Commanding-in-Chief touch. Engineering experts are wanted.

(4) For a Battery Commander's course at home. R. is in for this too, and will get first whack as regards recommendations. Meanwhile I remain "one star"—quite a nice thing in stars too. Also one must always remember that one star differs from another star in glory.

Jack seems to have happed on a perfectly magnificent job. Entertaining Greek rogues on a

thousand a year, plus a liberal entertainment allowance, seems too good to be true in these lean days. He must have done splendidly out there to have got the billet. . . .

R. is away for a couple of days, so I am running the battery.

We have had a fairly quiet day owing to heavy gales and poor visibility.

I have got a very interesting French tome on the War, "Enseignements psychologiques de la Guerre Européene," Gustav le Bon; his attitude towards things is entirely judicial.

*25th October 1917.*

. . . To-day we have been practising methods of communication other than telephone. Happening to turn up pigeon regulations I came across the following :—

(1) Baskets must contain birds of different sex; distinctive mark on the back of cock bird will be blue, on that of a hen bird red. Birds should be released singly, and at least a minute must elapse between the several flights. So I held the pigeons out of the basket and examined them. No sign of blue or red on either of them. The important regulation as to colour-marking had apparently been neglected, consequently I dispatched the birds at minute intervals to Head-quarters with duplicate message as follows :—"Please note that distinctive sex-markings on pigeon's back have been obliterated." That is the only message we have succeeded in getting through.

There is a howling gale blowing 104 feet per second,

and the sand storms are blinding. No signaller can hope to read flag signals in such weather. The pigeons flew off straight towards the Boches' lines, the wind being in that direction. If they can't tackle the gale they will probably land somewhere in Boche country. Picture the disgust of the Boche "Intelligence Department" when it deciphers the message.

The Group Commander was quite pleased with my aeroplane shoot yesterday. This afternoon the airman has been up to have a talk about it and to see how we work things in the battery. I have got a charming little Left Section cook-house now, and the men are very enthusiastic in their letters home about their meals. I have made them run a stock-pot, with the result that we can work an extra hot meal of soup and oddments at 7 p.m. It makes a nice break for them in these long evenings. Also, when night firing is on, it is a great thing for them to be able to get hot soup at short notice in the cook-house. . . .

I heard to-day that my name headed the list of our group of the Ordnance job I wrote you about, however that does not go for much. Groups out here are as numerous as the sands of the seashore, and each one will be forwarding candidates to the Election Board. It is a dud day, and there is nothing doing. I struggled round the battery this morning, but didn't linger longer than was necessary.

I am fixing up progressive whist competitions between four sub-sections of the battery. It is a sort of thing that can be worked quite well in the limited accommodation of dug-outs. I am offering

the first prize and the Canteen will pay up the second prize. I am having the canteen enlarged in order to make it into a sort of "Ye Olde Beere House." We shall fix up a stove of some sort and furnish it with benches of rude timber and pint pots. It will be just a splinter-proof shanty; there are several good dug-outs quite handy in case of need. The "unplumbed" one has been magnificent to-day, we have had a grand wind of 100 F.S., which is equivalent to a wind of about 65 miles per hour.

27th October 1917.

MY ROSEMARINA SWEETHEART DARLING,—When I read in your diary that you had got a new green coat, and a green belt with a black collar, I jumped off the stool I was sitting on, ejaculating loudly, "Good gracious, what next?" When I came to the black hat and black buttons and white socks I made another great leap into space and caught my shin against the edge of the table. "Impossible," I said to myself as I read on, "impossible. I never heard of such a thing in all my life, *Jamais de la vie.*"

This is what I read: "White best slippers for Sunday, and buttons on them, very shiny." When I had become quite calm again I took up the diary again and went on reading. And this time my astonishment was so great that I sprang right up into the air and nearly knocked my head against the top of the dug-out, and this is what I read: "White gloves, and pink and blue and purple handkerchiefs, with trees and little dots in the



corner." Fancy there being such wonderful hankies in the world when a great war is raging. When my excitement began to die down, I said to myself, "Surely there can't be any more new things that Rosem'ry has got, it is impossible, quite, quite impossible." I picked up the diary again and began to read. Almost immediately with one bound I sprang into space, spluttering, "Odds Bodikins, by my Halidame, Grammercy!" This went on for nearly a quarter of an hour. The new kilty suit and brown galoshes had been too much for me altogether. I nearly lapsed into unconsciousness. Well, well, I feel quite jealous. I think I shall have to go into town and buy myself a pair of pink socks with purple stripes and little blue singing birds on each toe. Then I shall come tripping back to the battery singing :—

"Heighty iddly ighty,  
Bustle me home to Blighty,  
Blighty is the place for me."

I hope your cold is quite well now ; you were a silly old chump to get one. One thing you must remember, it is the most important thing in the world ; I believe I told you about it once before, but you may have forgotten it. Anyhow, try and remember it this time for good. By so doing you will be following the best traditions of the Service, called "Beddy Byes ; shut your eyes before you go to sleep" ; also, "if your food you do not swallow, you will soon begin to holloa."

Lots of kisses to you all.—Your loving

DADDY.

*To his Wife.**October 29th, 1917.*

. . . Misery acquaints a man with strange bed-fellows, we are told; sometimes it seems war acquaints a man with strange birthday treats. October 29th has figured on the list for some time as my night for the unhealthy O.P. we have recently taken over. It is allotted to our battery every fourth night, and it has to be manned from 5 p.m. to 7 a.m., and as it takes about one and a half hours to get there, the job pans out to seventeen hours. That was my little birthday treat. R. wanted me to send another as a substitute, but I had no intention of interfering with fate. I arrived safely, via dark tunnels ankle deep in water, at the desirable residence in a once fashionable town. The town boasted at one time some decent public buildings, including a fine church, but they have "all gone out of the way and have altogether become abominable." It is now a mere derelict city of the dead—all is lifeless rubble, nothing moves, and whatever congregation there is is assembled in cellars in underground tunnels. A few houses retain their original form and are merely pock-marked by bombardment. It was to one of these, reinforced by concrete, that I betook myself with my telephonists. I arrived about 4.30, just as you were sitting down to my birthday tea, reinforced with Rosem'ry's beautiful pink tea service; it was pink, wasn't it? I hope you all had a nice fat tea and got my letter in time for crackers. This O.P. resembles in many respects that other about which I wrote you in July. There is the same rickety ladder arrangement up

the centre to the third floor and the same system of draughty saps. Everything has to be negotiated in complete darkness, as anything in the nature of a light except in a cellar basement would show up in the Boche line.

This O.P., however, is stronger and better than the other. There is more reinforced concrete about it, and there is a decent sort of cellar of sorts with a stove in it. You can brew yourself hot drinks during the night. I did very well off cocoa and those soup squares you sent me. A square of mulligatawny and another of mock turtle combined together produces an excellent meaty pea soup. You may find this of use to remember when the supply of peas fail. Give the tip to Rhondda and the *Daily Mail*.

It has just gone 5 a.m., so the night is drawing to a close. At 6 a.m. I am going to brew some hot cocoa. There is an abundance of wood in the town for the purpose of fuel. We go out periodically and scavenge amongst the neighbouring ruins for suitable pieces of timber. It has been a wonderfully quiet night—a record quiet night for this place, I should think. Generally scavenging has to be done with the utmost wariness. To-night you can wander about in peace. There is a gorgeous moon, gables and low walls look quite picturesque. I was reminded of a moonlight night I spent amongst the ruins of Luxor and Carnac on the banks of the Nile.

Far away in another sector there is a steady roll of drum-fire, and overhead bombing planes can be distinctly heard. Now I must return to my watch

tower and relieve the bombardier, who is probably perishing of cold at the end of his two hours' vigil.

*October 31st, 1917.*

MOTHER MINE,—I was so glad to hear that Peter was on the mend. And now you are with them I have not the least doubt the mending will go on speedily. You are worth a host of doctors and nurses in these emergencies. I hope you are keeping fit and are getting proper sleeps. . . .

The winter climate of Edinburgh always figures in my mind as the beastliest in the British Isles. If psychological research were made its existence no doubt could be shown to have a very direct bearing on the prevalence of lack of humour in Scotland. If you live on the East coast, the wind freezes any incipient smile you may have conjured up, and if you migrate to the West it dissolves it. Between the devil and the deep sea there may happen to be a normal glen or two, but even here the configuration of the country is such that you can't pass from glen to glen save by circumferential walk, and having in the space of half a day tramped to a spot across the hills almost immediately north or south of your starting-point, your fatigue and boredom is so profound that you lapse for the remainder of the day into a chronic state of sardonic dourness. . . .

I have recently had a fatigue party daily, enlarging the canteen. We are putting something of a club-room in front of it and furnishing it with a fire. It will be a small room as rooms go, but consider-

ably more spacious than a dug-out. "Ye Olde Beere House" I am calling it, and in the parlour prodigious gossiping will take place. I am making the roof proof against a 4.2 shell, it would take too much material to attempt anything more. There are good dug-outs quite close to it, so in the event of its being shelled the inmates could get good cover immediately. Canteen profits run to about 1300 francs now. We have got quite a good sum for winter entertainments. You've got to cut your social activities to suit your dug-outs. You can't bring a large number of men together as there would be too much danger from shell-fire. . . .

*Nov. 2nd.*

MY DEAR OLD MAN,—. . . I like the new name of my dug-out, the Cave of Adullam, very much indeed. You must send out the name written in large letters on a cardboard or painted on wood.

I can then nail it up in front of the new little verandah I have built on to it. I have altered my telephone call in the dug-out to C.A. (Cave of Adullam). In Morse it is like this: — . — . — (C.A.), so whenever I am wanted on the telephone I get this call sent down first of all. Sometimes it comes by day and sometimes by night. My call used to be: O (— — —), then I altered it to D (— . .), and now it is C.A. Some people talk Morse by saying umpty for long, iddy for short; in this language my call would be umpty iddy, umpty iddy, iddy umpty.



*To his Wife.**November 6th, 1917.*

I have had a long tramp in the rain across country with our new Colonel this morning. We visited O.Ps. and batteries. He sent word up from the group that he wanted me to conduct him round, and this with an object which I found out in the course of our tramp round. I have been in the army nearly two years now, and this particular Colonel is the first man I have struck who has realised what a life of a forty-one-year-old subaltern is in France. It was quite refreshing. He asked me what I wanted. I said I did not very much mind what it was, as long as it provided me with occupational work for the winter. He said he would have a talk about me with the General. I fancy his own experience has shown what it is like for a fellow of forty-one to be commanded by a fellow of twenty-six; these are the ages respectively of myself and R. As a matter of fact there is no difficulty of this sort in this battery. R. and I pull together very well, and each do everything that has to be done at different times. This I pointed out to the Colonel. However, he stuck to his point, which is a good sound one in a general way, and seemed to feel a somewhat independent sort of command was what I wanted. I told him clearly that I didn't fancy a winter of merely carrying on out here and I wanted more work to occupy me. . . . Such criticisms as I have had of him hitherto have hailed from Battery Commanders. What I saw of him this morning quite convinced me that he will be top dog altogether in the group

and Battery Commanders will have to fall in line with him and his methods. He is gingering up all the batteries—inspecting personal possessions and O.P. and enforcing a higher standard of efficiency. Of course, it is rather pleasing to find senior officers visiting O.Ps. A senior officer is a *rarissima avis* there. O.Ps. are the domains of subalterns normally, and it is a mighty good thing to get a Colonel popping round occasionally on a visit of inspection and gingering things up. You will never get the right sort of efficiency when the gingering process emanates from the back end of a telephone.

I hope these air raids are not interfering with your nights' sleep? You will have to educate your subconscious self into permitting your conscious self to go to sleep in peace unless danger crops up.

The Boche has been busy shelling our area all this afternoon. We shall have to make him repent his misdeed to-morrow.

Nov. 8th.

We had it pretty fierce yesterday afternoon from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., with a bit of gas to finish up with. I was writing my letter to you in my dug-out for the first portion of the bombardment, but cleared out about 4.30 and made for the B.C. along the trench at my best 100 yards a minute pace; the B.C. post is pretty strong. In consequence of the strafe the position to-day has been creeping with red hats all out to see the results of the show and to have a look at craters and damage. Well,

little damage was done and casualties were very light.

I have been up at the O.P. all day since 7 a.m. Visibility was bad in the morning, but improved as the day proceeded. I had a good shoot this afternoon at a Boche battery and a large house adjoining it. We silenced the battery, inflicting quite a number of casualties, I should imagine. The bursts were excellent and the shutting-up process quite sudden. We also got a direct hit on the house, which is no doubt their billet, and should have carried on at it a bit longer if the light had lasted. However, we will give them plenty of the best another day and make them search in the wilderness for their billets. I discovered another little "Cushy" place to-day which obviously harbours dug-outs. I hope to get a few salvos of our best on it shortly. It is a shoot which will want sunlight, as surroundings are rather difficult in grey light. I could have got it all right this afternoon if we had not been otherwise engaged. The other afternoon we just missed getting a useful little working party, which was busy shovelling. Telephone communication broke down, but perhaps not knowing the near shave they had they will return to the job another day.

This is rather a bloodthirsty letter, but having been shelled both yesterday and to-day in the O.P. I feel just ripe for getting my own back. The Boche figures in one's mind out here chiefly as a target, and when you see a nice little working party, it obviously needs a shell right in the thick of it to complete the artillery picture. Similarly the Boche

habitation is an abomination. It must be razed to the ground. May the time soon come when real Boche property on the banks of the Rhine will be subjected to an artillery concentration; give me the job of observing.

Mother's birthday present book, "Life in the World to Come" (Bishop of Edinburgh), arrived opportunely, like the parcel she sent when I was in bed with sciatica. It came yesterday. I read some of it this morning up in the O.P. when it was raining and found it quite interesting. He has got his knife into the Raymondian Psychical Research crowd and such as look for empirical evidence of future life.

#### CAVE OF ADULLAM.

MY DEAR OLD MAN,—I was glad to get your last report and to see that you are still going strong.

"Over the hills leapt Sunny Jim,  
Force was the Food that raised him."

Force is rather like War Bread, so I expect it produces the same sort of pushful energy.

What I am writing about this evening is our battery cook, and things appertaining to the cook-house. We don't have kitchens in the army, it is always cook-houses. Well, our cook has got the most extraordinary name. If you and Rosem'ry and Michael each had 50,000 guesses for 50,000 days I am quite sure you wouldn't guess the name right. His name is "Go-to-Bed"—Gunner "Go-to-Bed," and he always does what his name tells him to do when his day's work is over. Cooks can, you see,

because they don't have to fire the guns at night ; what they have to do is to cook the rich, red, ripe, streaky, rationed bacon for the hungry gunners in the morning. I never have to say "go to bed, Go-to-Bed," or "why don't you go to bed, Go-to-Bed?" because Gunner Go-to-Bed always goes to bed when his day's work is done. Well, Gunner Go-to-Bed is helped in his work by two cook's mates. Their principal job is to fetch the water, bring up the rations from the lorry, peel the potatoes, and serve out the food to the sub-sections. Every day I visit the cook-house to see if it is kept clean. If it is not I strafe horribly in a stentorian voice of thunder. "Go-to-Bed," I say, "Go-to-Bed, why do you go to bed and leave the cook-house in this dirty state? Let there be no more of it, or sure as the Boche is doomed there will be no go to bed for you to-morrow night."

As a matter of fact I have not had to say this to Go-to-Bed, because he is a very clean cook, but other cooks are not all like him. I have only had Go-to-Bed for a week. I go to bed myself feeling quite sure that the rich, red, ripe, streaky, rationed bacon will be very appetising in the morning.

It has taken rather a lot of this letter to tell you about Gunner Go-to-Bed, so I shall have to shorten down the rest.

The rest is about how rations reach us from a place called the Base, which is generally a sea-port town. All the bread is baked at the Base, more than a million loaves a day; and nearly all the other food—meat, rice, cheese, potatoes, jam, butter, etc.—also comes from there. It is sent by train to



different Ration Dumps, which are spread about along the whole front behind the firing-line. Our Dump is about 5 miles from here. The person who sits in the Dump and looks after our Battery rations is called Bombardier Mayfield. His job is to see that we get our full share of rations and anything else that may be going. One day a mistake was made by another battery on their indent, the paper on which you write what you ought to have. The result was that half a sheep was left at the Dump (a dead one)! What do you think Bombardier Mayfield did? Did he leave it there? Not he. He put the old bird in our lorry and brought it back to our battery. Good things like this don't happen every day. The men were very pleased with B.D. Mayfield, and chuckled with delight as they ate the nice juicy chops off the borrowed half sheep. Bombardier Mayfield generally finds something. Yesterday I had green vegetables for dinner, so when I visited the cook-house, I said to Go-to-Bed, "Was there an issue of green cabbage yesterday, Go-to-Bed?" "No, sir," he said, "Bombardier Mayfield found some on his way up in the ration lorry." So you see Bombardier Mayfield keeps his eyes open all right, though at the same time I have no reason to suppose that he forgets to shut them before he goes to sleep. I expect Bombardier Mayfield looked out of the lorry and saw some cabbage in the distance. "How unhappy those cabbages look," he says to himself, "there they are growing in an untidy garden near that bombed house, with nobody in the world to look after them. Poor things! I must see them a

little nearer"; so he halts the lorry, steps down and goes to inspect the poor little dears. He says, stroking them with his hand, "Poor, desolate, melancholy little dears. You come along with me"; so he whistles up the spare lorry driver and between them they carry the cabbages along. We had them for dinner yesterday. The men were very pleased, because it is a great treat to get green vegetables.

This morning Bombardier Mayfield brought up three tins of grease. He said he did not know if it was dripping in lieu of butter, or dubbing for boots. The cook smelt it and didn't know, I smelt it and didn't know, it smelt meaty but looked dubbing. So I said, "Go-to-Bed, find some brave man with a strong inside and let him be the judge. If all is well, use it on bread. If, on the other hand, a pain results in his strong inside, issue it for boots." No report has reached me as yet, the issue hangs in the balance. Well—well—well, this is a long story about rations, but the more you see of war the more you realise the importance of this great subject. The better the food you give the gunners the more Germans they kill. They lay the guns more accurately (hens aren't the only people who lay things) and they ram the shell home with more vigour in the bore. They sing on fatigue work when they think of that nice fat dinner the Gunner Go-to-Bed had got for them and they don't get so worried under shell-fire. If Æsop had written this letter he would have added a moral. And the moral would be something like this: "Always have your victuals tasty and be sure

there are plenty of them if there is work to be done."

Ask Rosem'ry what she thinks about it all? I seem to remember fat teas in cook shops, creamy cake teas, jam teas with a plentiful total thereof on the cheeks and chin of one Flickermaroo by name.

This has been a very quiet day, I have been wandering about much as I might do on the Common at Tunbridge Wells.

Good-night, old man, lots of kisses to you all.—  
Your loving

DADDY.

*November 13th, 1917.*

MOTHER MINE,—I hope Peter is properly on the mend and that he is getting rid of temperatures. You must be having a very worrying time under conditions rather dug-outish. I shall be glad to hear that you can safely leave Edinburgh for the South to take up your abode once more at No. 19. I fancy—though the Bible does not literally state it—that there must have been instances of good Angels "going to and fro in the earth and walking up and down in it"; and perhaps Peter, and certainly C. as he tramps the quarter-deck in the light of a meditative moon would hear the echo of a certain conversation and would affirm "There is none like her in all the earth."

I was glad to hear from Janet to-day that L. is coming to stay with her for a bit. It will make things

ever so much easier and will "keep the home fires burning." She seems very fit and well. . . .

Many thanks for my birthday present, the Sermons on Immortality by the Bishop of Edinburgh. They are very interesting. He is a little inclined to carp at those who seek by psychical research to get direct evidence on modern lines as to the nature of the future life. He feels in his own mind, I fancy, that it is not quite playing the game. I don't agree with his remarks somewhere about faith and the life of adventure. To my mind the greater the man's faith, the less can his spiritual life be said to be an adventurous one. He's planking everything on what he feels as a certainty, and adventure and certainty have nothing in common. If faith means adventure, and scientific evidence of the Raymondian type certainty, how comes it that the reasoning faculties cut such a poor show in the greater emergencies of life? Said a certain Mohammedan boy to me once in Cairo, "I know that the sun goes round the earth, but the geography teacher shows that the earth goes round the sun." He believed and had faith in the Koran. At the same time his mind intellectual saw clearly and appreciated the evidence contrary, but faith "romped home." His actions in life will be prompted by Koran and upbringing and not by the tenets of higher education. No, the Bishop of Edinburgh is making a mistake. He is not living a life of spiritual adventure. . . . It is the Raymondian people who are living adventurous lives—planking their hopes of a blessed hereafter on the eccentricities of Planchette and medium and the

vagaries of a modern Moses with automatic rod. However, I have not yet finished the sermons, so I may be doing the Bishop an injustice.

You will be interested to hear that the book arrived on a most seasonable day. We had a heavy concentration of hostile artillery on us which lasted for four hours. My dug-out has been named by Robin "The Cave of Adullam." I am expecting the name-plate any day. Meanwhile I have altered my telephone call to C.A. the Morse call (— . — . . —) and have had it registered at the Exchange.

David was more fortunate in his day, but possibly some of the later kings were worried by inventions. The evidence is slender, but I feel that the oft-repeated phrase, "Are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel," may conceal a multitude of abominations, amongst them the telephone and code! Ivory palaces, works of art æsthetic and even drains are specifically mentioned. For Engineering and Science the reader is referred to certain tomes and treatises called vaguely "Books of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel." Apparently few of them survive. . . . I hope K. is keeping fit, she will be glad if she is able to take Peter away from the rigours of Edinburgh climate.

CAVE OF ADULLAM,  
November 16th, 1917.

*To his Wife.*

. . . We have had a very quiet day to-day. There has been a kind of grey November mist with visibility not extending beyond a mile. I have just 'phoned through to group asking them to fix



up a Padre for us on Sunday. We have seen one once during the last five months, and on the occasion of his arrival all guns were in action and every other available man on munition fatigues.

I've got about fifty men with me here and quite good dug-out accommodation. So something ought to be fixed up.

We get mulcted in a variety of ways as Corps troops. We are nobody's children; we congregate, generally speaking, where the push is, and we are attached to armies. The good things of life, parcels from England, from distributing agencies, papers and magazines, rest in back areas, Christmas commodities, etc., are allotted to armies, thence to Divisions, and so on to battalions and Field Artillery units.

CAVE OF ADULLAM,  
*Sunday, Nov. 18, 1917.*

This week I've been busy fitting up Chapel and Canteen. I've taken a spare dug-out, quite a large one, and have put up a partition which serves as a threshold in three dimensions between soul and body. Yesterday afternoon, Saturday, I started telephoning for a chaplain. Group put me through to Corps ——. Corps put me through to another group. Eventually I received telegram that a Padre some 12 miles distant in waggon-line country would be with us at twelve o'clock, shell-fire permitting. So at twelve o'clock to-day I posted a guide with instructions to bring the Padre on arrival to the B.C. post. Half-past twelve. No Padre. Rang up group to make enquiries. Informed by

group that Padre was due at twelve o'clock and that nothing further had been heard. Left guide in position till 2 p.m., and then sent him back to his dug-out. At 2.30 appeared the Padre. He had lost himself in the wilderness, having had an abominable journey—part lorry, part walking, part Red Cross car, and having been deflected from the last stages of the normal track by hostile shelling. So I sent word to the senior Sergeant to report when ready, and gave the Padre a quarter of an hour's rest on the settee in my dug-out.

We had a fine congregation—forty out of forty-seven available—all packed into a space about half the size of the study at Buxton. At the end remote was the telephone, in case I was called up, a thin partition dividing it and the operator from the beer-barrels in the canteen.

We had shortened Evensong, with four hymns—"O God our help," "For ever with the Lord," "Thy way not mine," "Fight the good fight," and a short address. The Boche was shelling the whole time (Sunday is invariably his day of wrath, and he appears to get rid on that day of the unconsumed portion of the week's rations), but nothing fell near, and there was no inconvenience beyond vibration. Celebration followed after an interval of a quarter of an hour for getting some fresh air into the dug-out. Altogether it was very successful. It was a voluntary, not a compulsory, parade; but when men have been five months or so without seeing a Service, you can rely on a pretty good muster. The singing was very hearty, and the atmosphere towards the close even more so.

The *Times* of the 13th arrived to-day, and in it the announcement that I had been gazetted full Lieutenant. S. discovered it. I probably shouldn't have seen it myself, as I seldom read the Gazette. Collier, my servant, is now busy taking a brace of stars off one tunic and putting them on another. The rest of the story I have related to Rosem'ry. . . .

Italian news doesn't seem too good. However, there's a useful slaughter of Boches going on there now, and good may yet result. I should like to have got down there. . . .

(November 21st.)

Robin has got a delightfully candid touch in recording his misdoings. He writes in a recent diary, "I got a stripe (a bad mark) to-day. Of course, I don't expect this will be very good to hear." Or words to that effect. I hope he'll keep it up. It's very charming to hear of misdeeds when they are told with so bracing a touch. I've noticed a similar kind of rendering on other occasions.

Now I must drop a line to Robin. . . .

November 18th, 1917.

MY SWEET FLICKERMAROO,—I think that Father Christmas must have begun wandering about the dunes making arrangements for you and Robin and Michael buying Christmas presents. When I looked at the *Times* on November 13th, last Tuesday, I found that the Government of the Mighty Empire had decided to give me twelve

pennies a day extra pocket money, and another star. Everybody seems to be amassing stars, don't they? What a splendid collection of them we shall have soon! Well—twelve pennies extra pocket money for every day in the week—not Saturday money only, mind you—seemed to me too great a burden to carry on my own shoulders. As I was musing over this terrific and insoluble problem, Father Christmas, returning, I suppose, from a journey over the dunes, whispered to me a plan which seemed to suit very well. He said, "Instead of Daddy taking all the extra pocket money, it would be a good plan for Robin, Rosem'ry, and Michael to have some for buying Christmas presents with." He's a very thoughtful man is old Father Christmas, and mighty wise withal, with that long and flowing white beard of his. So the arrangement we came to was this: Robin has a penny a day, you have three-farthings a day and Michael a halfpenny a day up to Christmas Eve. But even now I have not told you the most extraordinary part of the story, because somehow or other Father Christmas made the Government of this Great Empire ante-date (as it is called) my extra pocket money to July 1st. Now between July 1st and Christmas Eve there are a tremendous lot of days, the counting of which brings me to the next part of the story. Father Christmas, as he wandered with me over the dunes, told me that his pet Christian name was "Quid pro quo"; funny name, isn't it? Mummie will explain why he likes this name of all his names best after Father Christmas. So I said, "Well, what must they do to get the money for buying

Christmas presents ? ” Father Christmas stroked his beard and looked into starry space. Then he said quite suddenly, in a brisk staccato voice, “ Robin must learn to find out for himself between now and Christmas Eve (1) the number of days inclusive from July 1st to Christmas Eve ; (2) the amount of money in shillings and pence which a penny a day for these days amounts to.

“ Rosem’ry must learn to find out, given the number of days, the number of farthings she will have by the time of sunrise on Christmas Eve—sun included.

“ (3) Michael must learn to say Father Christmas, and accompany his speech with a cherubic smile.”

That was rather a long speech for Father Christmas. But he had not yet finished, he drew a long breath and smoothed a kink out of his long snow-white beard. Then he proceeded : “ Another of my pet names is “ *Conditio sine qua non*. ” I was rather flabbergasted to hear such extraordinary names being the property of old Father Christmas. But then I remembered that he had lived a very very long time, and so had been given names for past ages. “ Yes,” said “ *Conditio sine qua non*, ” “ in any case half the presents must be for wounded soldiers or sailors, or for poor people who don’t get many Christmas presents. Yes, that is a rule I always make. I have spoken.” Father Christmas seemed to dissolve up into the sand like Beddie-Bye choccies in your mouth, and I saw him no more. So I wandered back to the Cave of Adullam, and put pen to this piece of paper.

This important story has taken up nearly all my paper, so I shan’t be able to tell you many more



things. I hope you are getting on nicely with your sewing, and that you will be able to darn my socks for me next time I come home. I will save up some nice big holes for you. . . .

Lots of kisses to everybody.—From your loving  
DADDY.

CAVE OF ADULLAM,

*To his Wife.*

*November 22nd, 1917.*

. . . I have just sent word to the guard to warn the sections to be on the *qui vive* for a gas attack. There is a good lot of gas shells coming over some little distance from here to inconvenience us. Curiously enough I had a gas helmet inspection this afternoon at two o'clock, so the men will be crediting me with prophetic insight or inside intelligence. The drill was quite good except in the case of a few recent reinforcements, the average time taken to fix up the helmets being about seven seconds.

I am quite in a fog as to what the rationing system is at home. I picture Rhondda rhodomontading, and Yapp yapping, and that is about as far as I have got. Geddes occasionally chimes in with a groan when the submarines are baulked of their prey, whilst Asquith sits in the background with an expectant look on his face of "Wait and See." When every country in this blessed universe is creeping with folk who don't know what self-denial is, but at the same time keenly appreciate what law is, it seems quaint that we should doggedly pin our faith to the voluntary principle. My old

farmer at Horsham typifies the main crowd: "Oh, I eats more than ever, I do get so hungry."

Four reinforcements arrived here to-day. In civil life two were accountants, one a grocer's assistant, and one a gasworks' man. All young and able-bodied, they all should have been war veterans by this time instead of raw recruits. Better late than never. . . .

On November 21st his third son was born (David Neale). He writes on November 24th to his wife.

MY SWEET OLD NAUSICAA,—Splendid! I found your telegram awaiting me on my return from the battery this evening. I was hugely delighted. Give David a big kiss from me. . . . I expect Flickermaroo will be wondrous sweet with him. . . . It's a great relief that all has gone so well. War introduces complexities. Had I been gassed or wounded a month ago there might have been a pother. David will now no doubt make a doughty reinforcement out here about 1936 A.D. . . .

*November 26th, 1917.*

Your letter and Mother's descriptive of David arrived to-day. He seems a very splendid person. The War Office ought to give me a special fortnight's leave to have a visit to England. Has Michael shown any symptoms of jealousy? . . .

I am over in the old position for the night. R.

wanted to get away to the camps to-day, so I came over to take charge. I had quite a good show to-day and silenced a Boche battery. Yes, David has chosen a splendid time to make his appearance. Church bells seem to have been ringing gaily, for the first time since war started, all over England in celebration of the Cambrai victory. Things, too, look much brighter in Italy. The Piave line looks like holding. Further, if General Plumer is commanding down there we must have quite a considerable force in process of taking the field.

I was very glad to hear that Mother had arrived safely from Cambridge. She gives a very glowing account of David—features as well as behaviour.

*November 27th, 1917.*

. . . Things are getting very quiet up here. I'm glad to say we've only had one casualty since I returned from leave, with the exception of one officer and one man gassed last week at the night O.P. They will both get over it, I think, but there was a heavy concentration kept up for some time. I gather from what I have heard that they ought not to have been talking through the telephone, which was the main cause of the trouble. Personally I would not talk without a direct order from higher authority so to do. The buzzer is there on the telephone for Morse messages and is the obvious thing to use during a gas attack. On all occasions near enemy lines you have to buzz if the message is important in any way, otherwise the Boche listening apparatus would pick it up. Sound

instruments have reached a high degree of perfection in these days. Just as old Professor Milne sitting in his cellar in the Isle of Wight can pick up seismic disturbances by his seismometer and graphic stunts, so we can pick up the position of a gun in action by means of sound-recording instruments. Sound ranging is becoming pretty accurate, given the proper conditions. Of course, during a bombardment there is too much disturbance altogether for sound ranging to be efficacious. I saw some pictures in the *Daily Mail* the other day showing the King present at some experimental work in a huge tank some 600 feet long. I should think some very interesting sound-ranging work could be done in such a place. . . .

I have written to the Nasr and Shaw and have given the Nasr up-to-date information about the family. After a short summary of family history I said, "I direct your particular attention to David Neale, as I am writing to ask you to be Godfather to him. He's a lusty fellow; he weighed ten pounds at birth and boasted a stature of 22 inches. I don't know how many cubits this is, but the information is obtainable in the Books of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. So far then the youth has brought no discredit on his illustrious namesake, and I feel that if you will undertake the onerous duty of watching his career there is every chance that he will follow the best traditions of the son of Jesse. His other name, Neale, is that of my Grandfather (John Mason Neale); the youngster, therefore, with the Psalter and the Hymn Book innate in him, so to speak, ought to

be able in due course to turn out a quatrain or two with some ease."

*To his Wife.*

*November 29th, 1917.*

... We've had a lot of stuff over to-day and the game is still proceeding. So I took the opportunity this afternoon to lecture to the men—a great many of whom are reinforcements of recent date, on the general experience we have gained as a battery since we came out. I had them all in the concert-room, a dug-out which, you will remember, is chapel and canteen rolled into one. Shelling was going on all the time, so it was a very suitable occasion for rubbing things in. I dwelt in particular on avoidable casualties under three headings:—

(1) Personal behaviour.

(2) Precautions at the gun to avoid accidental injuries.

(3) Necessity of camouflage, on all and every occasion, to conceal position, equipment and ammunition from hostile aeroplane observation.

We have had avoidable casualties under number one from wrong attitude towards an approaching shell. If a Howitzer shell is a tired one you may get as much as two seconds between the sound of the approach and its burst on the target. Well, two seconds is a liberal margin of time for a dive to earth. It will even give you time for a dive into a shell-hole five or six yards away, but to attempt to run in open country towards a dug-out or trench any distance away is madness. You expose a big



target to shell splinters, whereas if you are flat on the ground your chances are very good unless the burst is very close to you. Having successfully eluded the first by being prone on the ground, then run like a hare by all means to a decent cover before the approach of the next one.

Curiously enough as I was walking back to the B.C. post from the canteen, immediately after the lecture, the Boche provided me with an object lesson and I was able to practise in full view of a number of men what I had been preaching. I had just reached the open ground lying between the men's dug-outs and my destination when a shell came along. So I got flat, waited for the burst and splinters to subside, and then walked on to my dug-out. The shell pitched well short.

Here comes a bundle of letters to censor so I will continue later. . . .

Nov. 30th.

I find I am getting quite fond of *John Bull*. I see him most weeks, as he has a very big circulation out here. He is much beloved by the soldiers, he is always fighting their battles by exposing lawyers' craft and knavery at home and he has always got a smack ready for the politicians; they are an obtuse crowd and need heavy-handed cudgelling. *John Bull* does a lot of good out here. He is always cheery about the war and the might of Britain, and he finds his way with some regularity into the trenches. His prophecies are not particularly sound, but he errs on the optimistic side, which is the proper side for a war prophet. Ahab, deter-

mined to go to battle with the King of Syria, was quite right, I think, in his disinclination to interview Micaiah; it was bad for the morale of his army that a prophecy of evil should run through the ranks.

*Sunday, December 9th, 1917.*

We had a very comfortless three days prior to the actual move and a still more comfortless night at the column before moving off on route to our destination. We were all ready to move off from the position about 7 p.m., but were delayed by the non-arrival of trucks that were due to reach us at 6 a.m. for the loading up of supplies, ammunition beyond échelon. The men were standing by from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. Weather bitterly cold and rations rather short. Eventually I obtained permission to sling the ammunition job on to another party, and having said good-bye to group, I gave orders for the immediate breaking off of telephone communication with group and corps. The 'phone had been going all day in crescendo style and there was constant interruption of all jobs. The telephonists were not long in carrying out the order. I could then breathe freely, having severed communication with all sorts and conditions of higher authority and having a straightforward job to do of moving the unit to its destination. We had a horribly cold night at the packing place and had to wander about to try and keep warm. Sorting stores occupied a portion of the night, and making preparations for breakfast the remainder. We got off about 8 a.m. and had an uneventful journey to

the billeting place. The men were housed in a large comfortable shed plentifully strewn with new straw; they were all asleep by 8 a.m. and had a good ten hours' sleep, followed by a real substantial hot breakfast. I had a very comfortable billet in a cottage in the village and a real bed with sheets. The old lady kept coffee going all the time and fixed up quite a good breakfast for me in the morning. We dined at a café in the village and turned in about 9 p.m. The Major arrived in the car about eleven o'clock, having found his way back to us after returning from leave. The next day we arrived at our destination, and here, unless anything unforeseen occurs, we are likely to rest for a few weeks. We have had a long spell in the line—a pretty unwholesome part of the line, and as Corps troops we don't get ordinary periodical Divisional rests. I am very glad to leave that sector, it's a poisonous spot, and though it has certain advantages in the way of cover, the effect is more or less neutralised by the extraordinary far-reaching effect of shell-bursts on that kind of soil. Every inch of the ground has got a history, I am glad to leave it for fresh fields and pastures.

This is a very muddy spot. We walk about the camp on duck-boards and carry plentiful supplies of mud in everywhere. If you slip on the duck-board you drop into a gutter full of muddy water and oozy slime. Flash-lamps are very necessary at nights. . . .

We had a very good sermon from the Padre this morning from a text taken from the Book of Isaiah.

I can't quote it and haven't time to look it up, but it's a description of onward movement, the flight of an eagle—a steadfast march forward and a quickening pace as the ear listens for encouragement from the Lord of Hosts. He talked of war weariness and that state of mind expressed by the words "Fed up." He could not have spoken on a better theme. Everybody, of course, longs for peace and everybody is weary of war. All the nations are here agreed—at any rate all the soldiers in the fighting line—but it is just at this time that you get a real knowledge of what a nation is worth. There is a tendency at the present stage of affairs to magnify our ill-fortune and to refuse contemplation of enemy difficulties. It is so easy for anybody in the face of the Russian collapse to say, "Well, Russia will release German prisoners and then there is a million or so of reinforcements handy." We suffer a bit from disciples of Jeremiah in our mess; I am the incurable optimist, the Major and L. difficultly curable pessimists. I was ticking off L. this morning for despondency. However, he is more cheery to-night, having received a good mail from home. Now I must censor letters. . . .

*11th December.*

The Powers that be don't arrange things altogether prettily. I heard to-day that my name had been sent in for mention in dispatches, but that it had not gone through owing to the regulation with respect to period of active service. I don't know what amount of active service out here has to be

done, but probably when the names went forward I had not completed six months in France.

My endeavours to find jobs are not meeting with very great success.

I had the probable offer of Corps gas officer this week, but didn't care to have my name sent forward for anything active in connection with gas, other than experimental work. My feelings about gas are not entirely logical; it is a nasty, but under the conditions imposed on us a very necessary, form of warfare.

I'm all out for the production and use of gas on the best scale possible, but I don't personally want to have anything to do with it except in so far as it comes in the ordinary run of artillery duties. Consequently I would not go out of my way to seek a job of this sort, even though it meant a more or less independent command. . . .

We shall be going shortly into yet another corps, so the efforts I have made during the short period we've been in this one will automatically become valueless and waste paper basket-full.

Chances of promotion within the battery are getting more and more remote. . . . My chances of getting some other job have also vanished. We are now in a different group and different corps. In the old corps my name was down in the recommendation list for Second in Command. The new group and new corps know nothing about anybody's qualifications in this respect. The shuffling process makes everything all square. That's the trouble—one of them—about corps troops. Divisional troops stick to their division and move with it. A division



is a complete entity. But corps troops are here to-day and gone to-morrow. I shall try to get over to see Colonel L., if I can discover his whereabouts.

12th December 1917.

. . . I've been doing Christmas shopping to-day and have got nice presents for you and Mother and Robin and Rosem'ry. I have also got one for Michael which he won't appreciate particularly as an object, though it will appeal to him indirectly. It is a French music primer with a variety of songs in it, some of which are probably pleasing. Robin, too, might like to learn a few French nursery songs. Your present and Mother's are very charming, I don't really quite like parting with them.

I started this afternoon looking for nice simple little things of French origin and workmanship, and having had success almost immediately in the case of Rosem'ry, I had hopes of settling Robin on similar lines. Nothing was forthcoming, so I wandered on, and in the Rue de — I found a most magnificent selection of stuff. I was *très occupé* for a full hour and a half. I got Robin a very splendid painting and drawing outfit, in a wooden box with three successive tiers *en échelon*. It quite won my heart. Rosem'ry's original present thereupon became impossible. It was a silky handkerchief case with flowing ribbons, printed with the calendar of 1918. I explained the situation to Madame in extraordinary eloquent French, whereupon she produced an immense album very dull and uninteresting. After further conversation

she suggested getting another paint-box. "Well," said I, "that seems to display a poverty of imagination in the head of *le père*." She agreed, but made a counter-suggestion that a different-looking box containing the same articles would meet the case. I complimented her on her brilliance of intellect and jumped at the compromise. My honour was saved, Rosem'ry would have no occasion to complain of poverty of imagination in the head of *son père*. Further, she would acquire an article of splendid charm, and stood a reasonable chance of acquiring in addition the calendared pocket handkerchief bag. Thereafter things went smoothly. I showed a surprising mental agility in subsequent purchases. The rest of the story has to await the arrival of Christmas Day. I trust the Boche will not torpedo the lot. . . .

Dec. 17, 1917.

MOTHER MINE,—I like your "Garden plot" very much. In a little book I have sent you for Christmas (you mustn't know about it till Christmas Day, and if the parcel arrives early, which is probable, you must similarly forget its existence) there are a few pages near the beginning allotted to souvenirs. Your lines on the Garden plot in war-time should be written in there. You have made the flower season fit in beautifully.

The Q. prospectus did not enthrall me. The gap I found most incriminating—I write as a Headmaster responsible for a prospectus—was that blank one wherein should have been given the name, degree, qualifications and experience of the members

of the Staff. . . . As far as I remember they have no Cadet Corps, that seems to me to be something of a blot on the school escutcheon in these days. . . . R., I suppose, found himself in an awkward dilemma, he is dissatisfied with the average citizen turned out by the public schools, and in consequence is compelled to look for a more Heavenly Jerusalem—a Jerusalem that produces a handy man, and an intellect more active and alert in the lore of the humanities than the average Public School product of to-day. I, on the other hand, am inclined to find the home rather than the Public School wanting. I see very few homes where educational work is carried on during the holidays. Nearly all the oddment things which people clamour for, and expect the Public School to teach, can be tackled regularly three times a year under the intensive system at home.

“ I want my boy to be a handy man, to know something about carpentering and plumbing and simple repair work.”

*Answer.*—“ You’ve a village blacksmith, Ma’am, and a village carpenter. Let him hear them.”

“ I want my son to know shorthand and book-keeping.”

*Answer.*—“ There’s a bank clerk resident in your village. He will be only too glad to get the chance of a little private tuition.”

“ I want my boy to understand and practise the elements of farming.”

*Answer.*—“ Where there’s land, Ma’am, there you will find crops ; where you find crops, there you will find skilled labour. Your boy spends thirty-

seven weeks at school and seventeen weeks at home, why not tackle the land problem during a regular portion of these seventeen weeks? ”

Finally, in the most important domain of all, religion, the school cannot adequately tackle the job. It's a home problem, demanding insight and much individual attention. Here and there you find a peculiarly gifted schoolmaster who exercises an influence which lives. The ordinary run of man gives you the impression that he is adopting an apologetic attitude towards the Bible as a textbook.

I wonder how many hundreds of times your fertile mind has had to supply answers to the conundrum, “What is there to do this beastly afternoon?” Well, I'm not suggesting that you can eliminate the propounding of the conundrum, but I do say that the majority of homes takes up a mighty small element in the educational plot. Rest and holidays should be a change of occupation—occupation consisting in,

- (1) Plenty of time for slacking.
- (2) Organised citizenship work of some sort.
- (3) Reading and writing and arithmetic.

Number 3 lasts you all the time from the age of six or seven till the university or school sends you forth as its finished product. Some things in the public school system are the best the world has ever seen in any school system. That's a magnificent bit of vantage ground to start from. Of eccentricities there are a plenty. Here comes in the necessary adaptability of the home. Muddling through is a national characteristic—and both

"muddle and through" are constituents of our educational system.

Yes, Robin has stuck it surprisingly well during this his first term at Rose Hill. He was constantly missing days at Buxton, and that under conditions nothing like so severe and exacting except in the matter of climate. He seems to have developed a great deal. It is one of the prime evils of war that one cannot see these things.

REST CAMP,

Dec. 18th.

*To his Wife.*

. . . I look to you all to have a very cosy and peaceful Christmas, with lots of Yule logs, and turkeys and plum puddings, crackers, hymns and carols.

I think that spriggy shrub growing in the wall of the terrace will make a very dainty Christmas-tree. It won't sustain easily the weight of my presents for the babies, but they will get them at breakfast-time. Is there a children's service on Christmas Day? I expect not—but you'll be having a nice lot of hymns and carols after dinner. My choice will be, "While Shepherds watched" and "Aye, and therefore be merry." The babies will soon pick up the chorus.

If we are in rest here we shall probably get some proper Christmas Day services—if we are in the Line, we shall have to content ourselves with mind's-eye pictures. Personally I shall spend a very active day with you; and after taking a siesta in the afternoon in deference to the claims of turkey,



plum pudding and port (yours)—shall play boisterous games after tea, leaving a half hour before late beddy-bies for diary writing.

I think they ought to have select passages from Scrooge on Xmas Eve. It's rather too lengthy to read *in toto*. I used to heave a sigh of relief at the College the last Sunday of the Christmas term when the end hove in sight.

It's rather a different "Christmas future" from what we were hoping for last year. We hoped to avoid a fought-out duel between the Western and Central Powers, and we hoped to be a good deal nearer the finish than we find ourselves. But it's been a fine year for the Empire. We've borne the brunt of the fighting in all the areas of great activity—the Italian front excepted—and even there at the fall of the year we have managed to provide a strong reinforcing army. Germany has definitely lost all her colonial possessions, and her far Eastern schemes are definitely baulked, at any rate for the time being, by our hold on Bagdad and Jerusalem. I hope we shall be strong enough out there to hold what we have won, in the coming year.

Last Christmas we had the Buxton problem on our shoulders—yours in particular! This Christmas sees that problem definitely settled, and in addition a much sweeter problem to tackle in the form of David. So 1917 has been a very busy year for you, love, and you start the new year in a proper home surrounded by a family all showing goodly promise. I'm very thankful to feel you are quit of Buxton. . . .

*December 19th, 1917.*

MY DEAR OLD MAN,—A very happy Christmas to you and lots of presents from Father Christmas. I expect you are enjoying the holidays very much, particularly not having to get up quite so early in the morning. It is real Christmassy weather here, hard frost at night, and just a thin coating of snow on the ground. The water in my camp basin was frozen quite hard both yesterday and to-day, it was very gruesome work washing.

It is nice to feel that you had such a good term at Rose Hill. I didn't expect you to go right through the term without missing any day, because at Normanton you used to miss quite a lot of days. Altogether it is quite a stout performance and you have earned a leisurely breakfast or two. I shall send my mind's eye over to Tunbridge Wells on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day and take a part in all your doings. I shall help to decorate the house, sweep the path clean for Father Christmas, open parcels, sing hymns and carols, eat turkey and plum pudding—(not the 1916 one)—crack nuts, play games, and invent all sorts of uproarious pastimes, and last of all I shall take prayers and tuck you up safely in bed in such a way that all the rich morsels you have eaten won't make you roll out on the floor!

Lots of kisses.—From your loving

DADDY

REST CAMP,

*To his Wife.*

Dec. 22nd.

I think we are fairly safe for Christmas here, but don't be surprised if letters get a bit erratic afterwards.

D. S. came over to see me this afternoon from a rest billet he is in near by, and stopped for lunch and tea. I sent him back in a motor lorry. He's been through a good deal, has D., but he looks very well. He is now acting Captain and will probably retain his rank all right. We had a good yarn together. He is very little altered, and still retains that deferential manner of his which was always one of his charms. I don't think you would find many old boys calling their old Headmaster Sir, in the Mess, when Headmaster is Lieutenant, and old boy Captain.

Christmas Day, 1917.

*To all the wondrous folk**assembled at No. 19 Ferndale.*

We've had a very cheery Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, with a proper Christmas Service—decorations and food stuffs generally. I had quite a strenuous day on Christmas Eve. First as to obtaining a Padre. The Padre of last Sunday told us he was fully engaged elsewhere on Xmas Day and would not be able to give us a service. So I made enquiries elsewhere, and discovered that the incoming parties would have a Padre with them. I commandeered him yesterday afternoon, put him in touch with the camp, fixed up a pianist who can

defeat any hymn ever written, and arranged with the Adjutant for a compulsory parade for all troops. The Padre was a Scotch Presbyterian and the possessor withal of an extraordinary Soldiers' Hymn Book which did not contain "While Shepherds watched." We debated the hymns between us and compromised fairly satisfactorily with, "O come all ye faithful," "Hark the herald Angels," and the tune of "While Shepherds watched" to a rather mongrel prosy Scotch hymn full of ugly Latinisms. We had the proper lessons for the day, but had to content ourselves with the Scotch improvised prayers. It's a great weakness of the Scotch that they should lack entirely that nice sense of discrimination which would prevent them from discarding the wisdom of their own ancestors and ours. The result is that they pin their faith to improvisations of the hour, or to productions sedulously and conscientiously evolved, tabulated and learnt in the home sanctum. An improvised article lends itself readily to criticism, and that is why I suppose congregations favour the system. They can "creetise" their minister and compare his lucubrations with those of the more intellectual and inspired of their religious forebears. However, it was a very hearty service and the singing was excellent. The pianist completely defeated the hymnals. Having settled matters with the Padre, Adjutant, and Regimental S.M., I wandered into the forest in search of evergreen. It was a barren chase. The forest is nothing but oak and silver birch, but on the way home I passed the chateau of the Mayor of —; in his garden there

was quite a goodly show of "arbres toujours vert." So I called and was shortly presented to Mademoiselle. Having impressed upon her that I had no heavy destructive designs in hand, I was conducted by her to the gardener, and the three of us went round lopping. I got quite a good selection, the Mess looked quite gay; the bare deal boards quite lost their forlorn look.

My other job was settling up canteen business, preparatory to handing over to an incoming unit. There was a sort of Father Christmas stunt. I disbursed in all about 2000 francs of accrued profits to the various units in rest here.

During the course of dinner last night (the 24th) the sergeants turned up and sang Christmas hymns and carols. This was quite unexpected. They insisted that I should conduct for them and handed me an electric torch as a baton. We had "While Shepherds watched," "O come all ye faithful," and "Good King Wenceslas," quite a good selection. Afterwards they came into the Mess and had drinks. I've got all my Christmas cards and parcels. Mother's card arrived yesterday and a very charming one it is. It's much pleasanter to have Christmas presents that are not a burden as regards kit. The two turkeys were a great success. There were twelve of us at dinner, and I did the carving. Apparently it is a fallacy that a turkey needs to have several days before being eaten. Our two were killed on the morning of the 23rd and eaten on Christmas Eve. We had in addition a real plum pudding from Ireland—a M'G. contribution—champagne and port, and a plenty



of dessert. Your Brazil nuts came in very handy.

The men had their dinner at one o'clock to-day, and the Sergeants theirs in their own Mess at two. I had commandeered the Camp canteen for the men, so there was plenty of room to have them all properly seated at different tables. It was quite a goodly spread. The Sergeant-Major told me that there was considerable envy at all the good stuffs provided. Some units had taken no thought for the morrow. We had begun thinking about the Christmas morrow about the end of September. Every N.C.O. and man had a present of his own choosing, average price five francs fifty out of Canteen funds, and in addition Canteen profits had provided the wherewithal to feed 180 men on pork, vegetables, and apple sauce, apples, nuts and chocolates, white wine and beer, with cigars and cigarettes to finish up with. We've still got over 700 francs in hand.

I've done a lot of speechifying these days. It has quite reminded me of Christmas House Suppers at Buxton. Speaking to the men this afternoon at their dinner after the Major had addressed them and toasted the battery, I reminded them of a fairy story the children at home might be hearing about or reading about :—that fairy story in which a dog with eyes as big as a saucer, and some say as a round tower, takes a prominent part. Continuing on these lines I asked them to use their mind's eye on the same massive scale, and to seek to penetrate into the home where the children were carrying on the best traditions of Christmas Day in just

the same old way. It's the squalid surroundings the men feel most, the lack of all ordinary comforts, and the continual picnicing. To-day, for instance, they had no plates, just their Canteen for everything—a board table, a damp muddy floor, and a room to sit in which is a horribly draughty condemned derelict hangar. However, they were quite cheery, and felt, I fancy, an added glow of satisfaction that other units were in a far worse plight. There was quite a good concert for them in the evening.

We went into the Sergeants' Mess afterwards, and did a little toasting and speechifying there. The sergeants had provided themselves with champagne, and had raised somewhere a real white cloth, and provided themselves also with the real plates, knives, forks and tumblers.

I hope your booklet and Mother's arrived safely in time for Christmas. . . .

I got up this morning singing "How bright those glorious spirits shine," and it has been running in my head quite a bit to-day. I am just reminded that the reference I wrote in Mother's book is on similar lines. So great minds may have been hymning alike. I have also dealt considerably these last few days with the spirit of the text which you will find in your booklet. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Here comes an interruption in the form of the Adjutant to tell me that our move for to-morrow

<sup>1</sup> He wrote on a slip in this booklet: "Were I Archbishop of Canterbury instead of Lieutenant, R.G.A., I should appoint that sermons on the text (Luke ix. 62) be preached in all churches on Christmas Day."

morning is cancelled. There are two inches of snow on the ground, with every prospect of more. So that is probably the reason. *Réveillé* was down for 5.45 a.m. Now we can sleep in peace, and get up to a leisurely breakfast. . . .

To return to your text [S. Luke ix. 62]. There's a good deal out here at Christmas time of the "fed-up" feeling. It's a dangerous time of the year to get over. When we are safely past the New Year—another danger point—I hope we shall settle down again into our normal stride. Well, I've had an extraordinarily busy day passing to and fro between here and Tunbridge Wells. I thought the hymns were excellently well sung and the carols simply splendifical. Next year Robin and Rosem'ry will have to tackle "Good King Wenceslas" in front of a gramophone in order that I may have a record of it for the New Year. The turkey appeared to be nicely frizzled and the stuffing was—well—just "smutch" personified, if the expression will pass. The din from the crackers at tea was prodigious. I thought 5.9 shells were bursting all around me, and I looked round anxiously to discover my steel helmet. Another glance and I felt more at ease. Paper caps appeared. I shall hope to receive one shortly to add to the stock I acquired at my birthday tea party. The boisterous games after tea appealed to me greatly. I regret, however, that you didn't see your way towards tackling the tobogganing game down bookshelves placed on a slant on arm-chairs. I think Micky would begin to appreciate this game.

It's very charming to feel, love, that all the

babies have had a very lively day, and it doesn't affect infancy much for Daddy to be away when Mummy and Granny and Aunties are all standing by ready for action. It's past one o'clock, and I must get to beddy-byes. I'll add a line to-morrow before the post goes.

It was snowing hard last night when I went round the camp to warn the necessary people that *réveillé* would not be at 5.45 a.m. but at the ordinary hour. The camp was sunk in Christmas slumber. . . . I shall hear soon all about Christmas doings.

Lots of kisses to everybody  
from a watchful Daddy  
in France.

*To his Wife.*

REST CAMP,  
December 30th, 1917.

The letter search was very successful, the Sergeant-Major went off himself and after a good deal of detective work found the sacks of mail quite near the Line. I got nine letters and two papers to-night—*i.e.* all letters posted up to and including Boxing Day. We shall now get our mails regularly until we move off somewhere.

I am so glad you like your little book. It is very dainty, isn't it? And it is nice to have the French way of putting the Bible stories. A foreign language always throws fresh illumination. . . .

It was charming to get to-night the account of your Christmas Day. All the babies seem to have got on very well together—to have played quite up to the best traditions of the Christmas

text. I expect the grown-ups were watching things pretty closely, ready to step in gently did need prompt. It was splendid getting them all to Mattins on Christmas Day; I didn't expect David to be there. . . .

REST CAMP,  
*New Year's Eve, 1917.*

We have been separately interviewed by the Group Colonel to-day. He found us rather a quaint mixture of ages. He was quite interested in my case and seemed keen to find me a job of some independence. However, as he was interviewing a large number of officers, I don't suppose he will remember to find opportunity even if occasion offers. It is now nearly half-past eleven, and there's quite a rumble in the distance of drum-fire, so I suppose both we and the Boche are sending reminders that the New Year will shortly commence.

I shall be looking towards you all at midnight and wishing the Empire and all of us Good Luck in the name of the Lord. The war is certainly beginning to hasten. Events come thick and fast and the issue steadily narrows. It's been a good year for the Empire. This has been our year. We have borne the brunt of the fighting—we've supplied the sinews of war in an increasing degree to our Allies and we've made considerable sacrifices in the matter of supplying our Allies with food products we can ill spare. Now it is for labour to turn up trumps and for capitalists to play the game.



It's been a good year for us, love. It has seen David safe and well in the family circle—yourself removed from Buxton to a proper home—Mother snugly ensconced in a home which is as near a home as it can be when you've given your own up temporarily—Robin, Rosem'ry and Michael developing in a charming way and keeping well, and myself well launched in the Great Adventure. It's difficult to realise at home before you get out here how you're going to pan out under shell-fire and all the other abominations of this war, but the only permanent effect it has had upon me as yet is to give me a firm desire to carry on till the job has been satisfactorily pushed through. . . .

## CHAPTER V

### LAST LETTERS

1918

*To his Wife.*

REST CAMP,  
*January 3rd, 1918.*

We had a very successful dinner-party last night ; the Colonel was in good form, and showed himself very pleased to have had the opportunity given him of meeting all the officers of the battery in this way. There's nothing like a dinner for establishing an entente. I am Mess President now, so I had to run the show.

With Nurse away . . . you must have been having a very strenuous time. . . . Congratulate old Flickermaroo for me on the winsomeness she has displayed as a real lady. I like her remark about the relative usefulness of boys and girls in connection with looking after children: "Girls are more useful or *should be*, because boys will only be men some day, and girls will be ladies." Next time I come home on leave I shall expect her to know at all times

- (1) The whereabouts of my pipe ;
- (2) The hiding-places of my slippers ;
- (3) The number and nature of the various civilian clothes which have left my stock *en route* for deserving (?) Societies.

She might regard it, I think, as one of her duties to see that I have a complete rig-out when peace is declared !

It's still very cold here, but we are getting more fuel. We've got about three inches of snow on the ground. There's a hard frost every night, and a good many of the canals are frozen over. It seems to be an exceptionally severe spell of weather all over the world. I see that snow has even fallen in Florida, which is sub-tropical. A couple of months of this sort of thing will do the Boche a world of good. I have heard of no case of Christmas fraternisation this year. Further, the New Year was ushered in with a flourish of trumpets in the form of H.E. There was no mistaking the kind of welcome we offered. . . .

Remember me to Nurse T. I hope she's ever so much better. . . .

*January 5th, 1918.*

The concert went off very well last night, though it was perishing cold. Toasts were interspersed amongst the songs, and the men had any amount of smokes and plenty of beer. We started at seven and finished at 9.30. I sang a topical song which tickled them considerably. I enclose a copy of it : "Oost Dunkerque les bains." It is the village just behind our old battery position. Lombartzyde is on the Boche lines. It's now a hopeless wreck of tumbled ruins. Verse two refers to work done during the prolonged sandstorm which immediately preceded our move from those parts. Corps Headquarters were very troublesome and insisted on

a lot of entirely useless work on the roads being done. "Meteor" is the organisation which deals with variations of wind, temperature and barometer. We are supposed to get the kite balloon reading every four hours, or even more often, if there's a sudden change of any sort. But telegrams get delayed, and it often happens that you have got to tackle a 4-p.m. shoot on a 10-a.m. meteor report. We had four toasts during the evening. The Major gave the battery, to which the B.S.M. replied; the B.S.M. gave the officers, to which R. replied; I gave the W.Os. and N.C.Os., to which the Staff-Sergeant Artificer replied; and the Major gave the gunners, to which a bit of a wag, our Mess waiter, replied. It was quite a good show altogether. We were glad to get back to the Mess and to supper at 9.30.

#### REST CAMP CONCERT.

I've a story to tell of Oost Dunkerque les Bains,  
Which will fill you with horror and terrible pains;  
I've a yarn to relate of that barren old dune,  
And of Boches lying slaughtered in Lombart Zyde Town.  
Ri-teural-i-uril-i-uril-i-ay.

We've shelled them by night  
And we've shelled them by day,  
When we've done them all in,  
There'll be no need to stay.  
Ri-teural-i-uril-i-uril-i-ay.

I have strange things to tell of the Headquarters band,  
And of hours that were wasted in shovelling sand;  
The faster we shovelled the stronger it blew,  
With the corps doing nothing but hullabaloo.  
Ri-teural-i-uril-i-uril-i-ay.

We shovelled by night  
And we shovelled by day,  
It's a mighty thin job,  
When there's no extra pay.  
Ri-teural-i-uril-i-uril-i-ay.

There's a fellow called Meteor, a high-flying coot,  
 Who sends weather conditions affecting the shoot;  
 When it's blowing north-east, he will send you south-west,  
 And he swears that it's so in his own little nest.  
 Ri-teural-i-uril-i-uril-i-ay.

But the weather is different by night and by day,  
 And how do you expect the poor Gunners to lay  
 When Meteor sends problems in euril-i-ay?

There's a smart show put up by the Gunners, I guess,  
 When the O.Ps. awatching send down S.O.S.;  
 They tumble out quickly and get off the round,  
 And the front line is cheered by that welcome old sound.  
 Ri-teural-i-uril-i-uril-i-ay.

We support them by night and support them by day,  
 When we've done all the Boche in, we'll gleefully say,  
 Ri-teural-i-uril, and get right away.

*January 10th, 1918.*

MY SWEET OLD FLICKERMAROO,—This is rather a funny sort of camp, because it is a long way off the main road and the roads leading to it are too narrow for motor lorries to pass one another.

There are lots of little paths through the forests, and sometimes I walk into the town this way. Yesterday when I was walking in the forest I saw three deer. So I said to them, "Come along, my little pretties, and let me stroke your little backs." They cannot have heard me, because they galloped off lickity split, lickity split, and were soon lost to view in the undergrowth. I expect if you had been there they would have been curious to see what kind of a thing an old Flickermaroo was. Some day when the war is over we will have another look for them and take with us some nice fat lumps of sugar.

Mummy and Granny tell me that you are a very



useful old piece in the house and are following hard in the best traditions of the best ladies. I like to hear this very much. With Nurse away I expect there are lots of things in which you and Robin can help.

The weather is very cold out here; the ground is frozen hard and there's quite a lot of snow on the top of it. But to-day the Government has sent us some great big waistcoat gauntlets. They are made in leather and are nicely lined. The men are very pleased with them.

When a man feels ill out here he has to "report sick" at the early parade. He is then marched off to the M.O.'s hut (medical officer). Most mornings here there is a big queue of people waiting to see the doctor in order to get medicine for cold and coughs, and light duty. . . . Out here you don't get chockies given you after medicine, but if you like you can go to the shop called the canteen and buy chocolate or toffee. All sorts of things are sold at the canteen. I send a lorry into the town every day to get different sorts of food for the men. What they like best is cake, biscuits and tinned sausages. They cook the sausages over the fire in the evening and eat them with the greatest enthusiasm. They have more money to spend now than they used to have, because the Government has increased their pay. Our Government is a silly old thing in some ways, but it looks after the soldiers better than any Government in the world. There is one great mistake they make which the French Government does not make, and I don't expect you would guess this if I gave you a hundred

guesses. The mistake is this: the French give their soldiers two pairs of boots, one of which they wear, the other they carry on their back; we only give the soldiers one pair of boots. In consequence our soldiers often have to put wet boots on, day after day, which is very uncomfy; I expect you wouldn't like to have only one pair of boots, would you?

Give some nice fat kisses for me to David and tell him I am very pleased he has put on a whole pound of weight in one week.

Sweet dreams, old Flickermaroo, and lots of kisses from your Daddy, sweetheart darling.

REST CAMP,

*To his Wife.*

13th January 1918.

. . . Yes, I produced the song such as it is on the afternoon of the concert. The Staff Sergeant was pestering me to sing, so I told him I would produce a topical turn of sorts.

SUBURBAN BILLET, FRANCE,

21/1/18.

Since moving off with the Major from the rest camp I've arrived at a quite different part of the Front. The main body also has now been here several days. The last three days I've been out reconnoitring some 20 miles from here with a view to getting details as to accommodation in a number of villages, quite interesting work in very pleasant country. This afternoon the mails reached us. . . .

I got back yesterday in time to make a dash for the Opera House, with the object of getting a seat

for "Rigoletto." Lestilly from the Opera, Paris, was down to take the part of Rigoletto. When I got there every seat in the house was taken. This was about half an hour before the ticket bureau was opened. However, I managed to make my mission an important one by saying that I desired to see the Municipal Director of the Opera House. I then explained to the Chef de Billets that it was absolutely necessary for him to find me not only a seat, but a good seat. I had been for nine months in a poisonous part of the line, and had heard nothing but a gramophone. The situation was desperate. All this in abominably bad French, but in complete assurance that a seat would be forthcoming. Thereupon followed a great colloquy between various officials. They all talked at the same time and gesticulated wildly. But the result was that an excellent seat in the fauteuils was forthcoming for the price of seven francs. It was a splendid performance. Rigoletto was magnificent.

We are billeted in a suburb of a big town some fifteen minutes' walk from the tramway terminus. We are likely to be here another few days, and then elsewhere perhaps for a week before moving into the line.

I've got vague hopes of getting leave about the end of February, but shall know in a fortnight's time what the leave prospects for the battery are likely to be.

21/1/18.

MY DEAR OLD MAN,—. . . I slept one night in one of the villages in a very comfy bed at a large

farm-house. Just as I got there Mademoiselle was cutting the throat of a chicken with a pair of nail scissors. That seems to be the way they kill chickens in France. I left her chasing another chicken on which she had similar designs. Wasn't it naughty of her?

I met lots of funny people in the villages. One of the Mayors knew one word of English—"possibility." He used it on every possible occasion, pronouncing it "pozzeebeelitee."

"Have you got a chateau?" "Pozzeebeelitee."

"Have you any officers' rooms?" "Pozzeebeelitee."

"Is the water good?" "Pozzeebeelitee."

"Is there plenty of straw?" "Pozzeebeelitee."

"Is there any shelter for horses?" "Pozzeebeelitee."

At last I sprang up off the office chair and said in a loud voice of thunder—"Je desire ni *possibilité*, ni *probabilité*. Il faut que vous parlez de *certainté*." I glared at him like a tiger about to spring at an enemy's throat. Thereupon he gave me the facts I was in search of. . . .

Now it's time for dinner.

Sweet dreams, old man, and lots of kisses.

From your loving DADDY.

To his Wife.

SUBURB,  
23rd January 1918.

We are pushing off to-morrow and shall be in billets in the area. I reconnoitred for two or three days before moving up. I don't think letters are likely

to lose themselves, but you never know your luck. . . .

Adjutant told me to-day that the General was very pleased with my reconnoitring stunt, so I hope I shall get more work of this nature. It's quite pleasant and one is entirely on one's own.

1/2/18.

Quite fit and well, but very busy—working all the day and most of the night. Having a good snooze to-night.

A BLASTED HEATH,  
*Feb. 3rd.*

. . . A huge mail reached me last night—eight letters and four or five papers—and I've not yet had time to read them properly. We are living in that general stage of piggery—physical, mental, administrative—which characterises the taking over of a new position. I'm running the forward section, and am being left quite comfortably on my own. When I've got things shipshape I shall be quite ready to take my turn elsewhere, and hand over here for a period. Incidentally, too, if things go well, I shall put in for leave. I've no doubt the Colonel will back it, particularly when I impress upon him the fact that I've got a new baby to inspect. . . . Hope to find time to write a yarn soon. There's a mighty lot of work to be done here, and not much leisure at present. We have to work largely at night owing to observation by Boche planes during the day. . . .



## HIS LAST LETTER.

Feb. 4th.

. . . Very busy day. Quite fit and hoping to be off homewards bound by the 20th to the 25th of this month. I believe the Major forwarded my application for leave to-day, but I haven't seen him for a week and only heard through the telephone. I am next in the battery for leave.

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He was killed in action on the afternoon of Feb. 5th. A fellow-officer, who was wounded by the same shell, gives the following details: The work on the new position was just completed, and during the afternoon he slept. Awakened by a telephone call, he suggested that they should have one more look round. Almost immediately a salvo was fired, and they were both hit. His fellow-officer says, "he looked up and smiled at me, as I crawled away for help, but did not speak." When help came a few minutes later he was unconscious, and died soon after at the Dressing Station near by.

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*And so . . . they have gone with the smile of peace already upon their lips; and with the beauty of that fuller Peace already shining through the veil, they have passed to ampler opportunities of Service.—Rev. F. W. DRAKE, "The Way of Fellowship."*

## SIC LUCEAT LUX VESTRA

O HEAVENLY Father, Who hast commanded that we should love and honour our father and mother, incline our hearts that we may at all times obey thy holy law, remembering the home in times of difficulty and temptation, and keeping pure the family honour; through Thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

*Keep innocency and take heed unto the thing that is right: for that shall bring a man peace at the last.—Psalm xxxvii.*

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